

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

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### THESIS

**A RUSSIAN MAN ON HORSEBACK:  
THE RISE OF  
GENERAL ALEXANDER LEBED**

by

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March, 1997

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THE RISE OF GENERAL  
ALEXANDER LEBED**

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Lieutenant, United States Navy  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**


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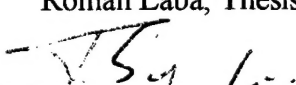
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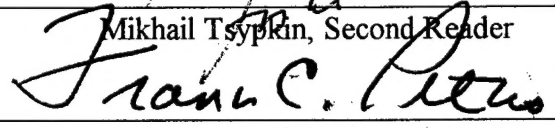
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## ABSTRACT

General Alexander Lebed burst upon the Russian political scene like a gallant man on horseback, promising to restore order out of chaos, crack down on crime and corruption, and resurrect Russian nationalism. The 1996 presidential elections confirmed his growing, independent constituency of those who could not continue to endorse the Yeltsin government, yet would not retreat to the old ways by voting for the communist candidate Zyuganov. Quickly appointed as national security chief, Lebed won the vote for Yeltsin in the run off election, but was dismissed just four months after taking office. Still, Lebed is today the most popular politician in Russia, admired for his blunt, honest manner and his ending the war in Chechnya.

Without the communist party, the uncertain civilian control over the Russian military--especially forces outside the Russian Federation--paved the way for generals like Lebed. As an army commander in Moldova, Lebed captured the public's imagination as a firm, honorable, professional soldier.

Lebed earned the reputation as a crude and forceful leader, but did not develop into the red-brown nationalist portrayed by Western journalism. In this first-ever critical biography, he was instead a charismatic, skillful yet trainable politician capitalizing on nationalism and the appeal of strong, authoritative leadership.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
II.	WHO IS ALEXANDER LEBED? .....	5
	A. YOUTH .....	5
	B. AFGHANISTAN .....	10
	C. DIVISION COMMAND EXPERIENCE .....	11
	D. QUILTS COMMUNIST PARTY .....	14
	E. LEBED'S FAMILY .....	15
	F. LEBED, YELTSIN AND THE FAILED COUP OF 1991 .....	16
III.	THE FIGHTING GENERAL: LEBED IN MOLDOVA .....	23
	A. BACKGROUND .....	24
	B. LEBED APPOINTED COMMANDING OFFICER.....	26
	C. LEBED'S STAND AGAINST MOSCOW.....	27
	D. LEBED ENDS THE CONFLICT .....	29
	E. LEBED'S POPULARITY GROWS.....	32
	F. LEBED ELECTED TO TRANS-DNIESTER LEGISLATURE.....	38
	G. LEBED RESIGNS FROM TRANS-DNIESTER LEGISLATURE .....	41
	H. LEBED RESIGNS FROM THE ARMY .....	43
	I. THE AFTERMATH.....	47
IV.	AFTER THE ARMY: LEBED CONQUERS MOSCOW.....	49
	A. THE PARLIAMENTARY CAMPAIGN: VICTORY WITHOUT SUCCESS.....	49
	1. Congress of Russian Communities .....	51
	2. The Campaign for Parliament.....	53

B.	THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN: SUCCESS	
	WITHOUT VICTORY .....	55
	1. The Third Force Emerges .....	55
	2. The Campaign for President .....	58
C.	APPOINTMENT AS SECRETARY OF SECURITY COUNCIL .....	64
D.	THE GREAT PURGE OF '96 .....	68
E.	LEBED MAKES PEACE IN CHECHNYA .....	71
F.	LEBED IS DISMISSED .....	73
G.	ALLIES AND ENEMIES .....	77
	1. Bergman, Krivilev, and Skokov .....	77
	2. Role Models: Lenin, DeGaulle, and Pinochet .....	79
	3. Ilyushin, Berezovsky, and Golovkov .....	80
	4. Grachev .....	81
	5. Yeltsin .....	83
	6. Chernomyrdin, Chubais, and Kulikov .....	84
	7. Korzhakov .....	86
V.	LEBED'S VIEWS AND POLICIES .....	87
A.	FOREIGN POLICY .....	92
B.	ECONOMIC POLICY .....	96
VI.	FOREVER A SOLDIER: LEBED EXPOSED .....	101
A.	THE APPEAL OF LEBED .....	101
	1. Sovereign Rule .....	102
	2. Strong Military .....	106
	3. Wounded National Pride: Lebed's Use of Contemporary Russian Nationalism .....	109
	a. <i>Background</i> .....	111
	b. <i>Today's Russia</i> .....	112

c.	<i>Russian "Greatness"</i> .....	113
d.	<i>Protection of Russians Abroad</i> .....	116
4.	Integrity and the Law and Order Crusade .....	118
B.	MAVERICK OR RUSSIA'S NATIONAL HERO? .....	122
C.	"I AM A BIRD OF A DIFFERENT HUE" .....	125
1.	Lebed's New Set of Rules for Russian Politics .....	125
2.	Neither Red Nor White, but Green .....	128
D.	A SOLDIER'S DUTY TO THE PEOPLE .....	130
VII	CONCLUSION .....	133
APPENDIX A. SELECTED COMMENTS OF ALEXANDER LEBED .....		137
APPENDIX B. CHRONOLOGY OF LEBED'S CAREER .....		139
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....		143
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....		157



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CNN	Cable News Network
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KGB	Soviet Committee for State Security
KRO	Congress of Russian Communities
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NTV	Russian Independent Television Network
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like a gallant man on horseback, General Alexander Lebed aroused some hope among the Russian people that an enlightened dictator could put the country back in order. He is a nationalist who sees Russia's future greatness anchored in a powerful and respected Army commanded by an authoritarian leader. Lebed's personal courage, obvious military talent and the independence of his judgments, combined with his integrity and his open contempt for political maneuvering, make him a rare figure in Russia today.

In the 1996 Russian presidential election, Lebed became a surprisingly popular third choice for voters. He appealed to those who could not continue to endorse the Yeltsin government, yet would not retreat to the old ways by voting for the communist candidate Zyuganov. Lebed was quickly appointed as Yeltsin's powerful national security chief after he confirmed his claim to a growing, independent constituency.

After using Lebed to win the vote in the run off election, Yeltsin tried to gradually demolish him by giving him the Chechnya problem. Despite Yeltsin's plan, Lebed successfully negotiated a peace settlement ending 20 months of bloody conflict and furthered his popular image. Desperate, Yeltsin and his followers dismissed Lebed just four months after taking office, but only succeeded in again increasing Lebed's already soaring popularity. Lebed had become the most politically viable presidential candidate for the 21st century.

But how did a young army paratrooper who admittedly knew nothing about politics, who disavowed the Communist party and publicly lambasted the Yeltsin government rise to become one of the most powerful men in Russia and the heir apparent to the presidency? Lebed's appointment and dismissal as Yeltsin's powerful National Security Adviser demonstrated certain aspects of current Russian politics and the nature of Russian society.

To many Russians disillusioned after the pain of market reform and the shrinking of their empire, Lebed's message was clear and soothing. He spoke in blunt, vivid images, with a sharpened instinct for what many Russians were yearning to hear. Lebed was also

an outsider in Russian politics, winning nationwide popularity for his outspoken criticism of the government.

In Russia, the presidency dwarfs all other political institutions, and it is ultimately the president who determines the country's domestic and foreign policies. If Alexander Lebed (or another nationalist candidate) is eventually elected president, it will have widespread impact on world affairs - though the impact may not be as severe as many Western analysts fear. It is important to understand, therefore, what he represents and from what base Lebed gains his popular support in order to deal with this kind of administration. Lebed may offer a window into what the future Russia will resemble.

Alexander Lebed was born on 20 April 1950, in the industrial city of Novocherkassk in the Rostov region of southern Russia. In 1962, he witnessed the "Novocherkassk massacre," when Soviet troops guarding the local Communist headquarters opened fire on workers staging a rare protest against rising prices and falling wages. The shooting killed 24 people, and several others were subsequently executed.

Lebed graduated from Ryazan Higher Airborne Assault Command School, and took command of paratrooper unit at age 23. From 1980 until 1982, he commanded the first battalion of the 345th Separate Paratroops Regiment in Afghanistan. Lebed was awarded the highest Soviet military decoration, Hero of the Soviet Union, for bravery in combat. He then graduated with distinction from the Frunze Military Academy in 1985.

Lebed rose from paratrooper regiment commander to division commander of the elite 106th Guards Airborne Division in Tula, approximately one-hundred miles south of Moscow. In April 1989, he was sent to put down demonstrations in Tbilisi, Soviet Georgia. Over twenty people were killed and dozens wounded when a *spetsnaz* unit under his command used sapper shovels and chemical weapons to suppress ethnic unrest. Lebed maintains he flew in with reinforcements after the attacks had happened.

In January 1990, Lebed was named by an Azerbaijani parliamentary commission as the individual who ordered soldiers to open fire on demonstrators in Baku, Azerbaijan. Using armored personnel carriers, his troops shot, stabbed to death and crushed more than 120 Azerbaijanis. He also quit the Communist Party that year after attending two party

conferences, saying he became tired of "screaming, rockets and petty bickering."

In 1991, Lebed's tanks inadvertently became part of the barricades protecting Russian President Boris Yeltsin's Moscow stronghold during the hard-liners' coup attempt against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. From Yeltsin, Lebed earned the title "savior of Russia." He later said it was not a stand for democracy, but that he could not kill Russians.

Lebed was assigned to command the Russian 14th Army in Moldova's breakaway region of Trans-Dniester, scene of ethnic conflict between the Moldovan government and mainly Slav separatists. In July 1992, Lebed's forces launched artillery barrages against the Moldovans, yet separatists took credit. Because Lebed kept silent about the attack, he was widely praised for ending the bloodshed peacefully.

Without the communist party, the uncertain civilian control over the Russian military--especially forces outside the Russian Federation--paved the way for generals like Lebed. As an army commander in Moldova, Lebed captured the public's imagination as a firm, honorable, professional soldier.

Lebed resigned from the army in 1995 over a conflict with Defense Minister Pavel Grachev. Grachev had called for bringing Lebed's 14th Army and its arsenal back to Russia proper and demanded both the removal of Lebed and a dramatic reduction in the 14th Army's manpower. In a survey of Moscow residents conducted the month he left the army Lebed ranked first among politicians viewed as able to provide stability for the Russian people.

Four years after the fall of communism, Russian democracy was still a fragile and recent institution. Lebed had even declared that a true democracy will not come to Russia "in my lifetime" -- a sentiment that was shared by even the most ardent but realistic Russian analysts in the Clinton administration, who anticipated that genuine democracy may be decades away. Lebed's rise in politics was associated with the aspirations of the Russian people, and was a sign of Russia's continuing struggle to transform itself into a rule-of-law state.

In December 1995, Lebed was elected to the State Duma, or lower house of

parliament. He was a charismatic patriot and crusader for justice, but was also simply a politician trying to achieve power. In doing so, his political campaign skillfully used nationalism and the appeal of strong military leadership at a time when everything he grew up to believe in gradually came apart after the Soviet Union's collapse. In Russia's situation, the people were demanding a leader like Lebed, and if he did not exist, another surely would have been created.

After Lebed finished a strong third in the presidential elections of 1996, he joined Yeltsin's team as head of the Security Council. Lebed persuaded Yeltsin to dismiss Defense Minister Grachev and the leading members of Yeltsin's inner circle assembled around him since August of 1991.

Alexander Lebed defied definitions. Some feared him as a Russian Napoleon dreaming of supreme power. Others saw him as a defender of Russia's new democracy. Still others considered him just a battle-hardened soldier turned skillful politician. Whoever he was, in just one year the former two-star general became one of the most important politicians in Russia and a powerful influence in the future of the nation.

As National Security Adviser, Lebed signed an agreement with Chechen separatists ending the war in the breakaway republic. The accord was publicly praised, but met with resistance from some top Russian politicians who said it will cause Russia to lose Chechnya.

In October 1996, four months after being appointed, Lebed was dismissed as head of the Security Council. Yeltsin accused Lebed of excessive ambition and complained that Lebed made decisions without consulting the president and the rest of the government. Opinion polls in the month before he left the office of national security chief indicated that Lebed was Russia's most trusted politician.

Among the military, Lebed was an idol. It is probably true that no Russian general since 1917, besides Marshal Georgii Zhukov, was so popular as Lebed. In 1957, similar to the way Yeltsin used Lebed, Nikita Khrushchev used Marshal Zhukov to defeat his opposition in the Communist Party and then removed him also in four months. But unlike Lebed, Zhukov was not open in his political ambitions for the highest office.

Lebed's popularity was a disturbing symptom of Russia's tendency to look toward its military officers for a savior. His message had strong appeal to millions of Russians battered by the dismantling of a state-controlled economy that long provided a low but reliable standard of living. The discontent in Russia was aggravated by a general breakdown of order, rising crime and a sense that it lost its place among the first rank of world powers. During the rise of Alexander Lebed, the greatest force in Russia was not democracy--it was nationalism.

If Lebed is someday elected president, there is no doubt that he would move the regime towards a new type of authoritarianism. As he has asserted, "Democracy is fine, but Russians will need decades to grow into it." So today, Russia's future remains open, but will be a distinctively Russian future. Russia will not become like America, Germany or Japan. One thing that looks certain is that Alexander Lebed will remain in the political spotlight for years to come.



## I. INTRODUCTION

General Alexander Lebed has emerged as one of the most charismatic figures in contemporary Russian politics. In the 1996 Russian presidential election, Lebed became a surprisingly popular third choice for voters. He appealed to those who could not continue to endorse the Yeltsin government, yet would not retreat to the old ways by voting for the communist candidate Zyuganov. After Lebed confirmed his claim to a growing, independent constituency, Yeltsin struck a deal to ensure his own reelection. In return, Lebed was appointed as Yeltsin's powerful national security chief.

After using Lebed to win the vote in the run off election, Yeltsin tried to gradually demolish him by giving him the Chechnya problem. Despite Yeltsin's plan, Lebed successfully negotiated a peace settlement ending 20 months of bloody conflict and furthered his popular image. Desperate, Yeltsin and his followers dismissed Lebed just four months after taking office, but only succeeded in again increasing Lebed's already soaring popularity. Lebed had become the most politically viable candidate for president.

This thesis will be a political biography of the Russian nationalist who tapped in to deep feelings of discontent in Russian society and captured the public's imagination as an honest, professional soldier. His strongest followers were those who were outraged by rampant crime and corruption, and who were tired of economic uncertainty and troubled by Russia's diminished status in the world. This following emerged as the armed forces continued to disintegrate and various parties deliberately pulled the military into politics. General Lebed is an example of this move of the generals into Russian politics.

The intent of this research is to explain how a young army paratrooper who admittedly knew nothing about politics, who disavowed the Communist party and publicly lambasted the Yeltsin government rose to become one of the most powerful men in Russia and the heir apparent to the presidency. Lebed's appointment and dismissal as Yeltsin's powerful National Security Adviser demonstrated certain aspects of current Russian politics and the nature of Russian society. His allies and enemies played a key role in his upsurge in popularity, and their impact will be addressed.



As the proverbial man on horseback, Lebed aroused some hope among the people that an enlightened dictator could put the country back in order. He is a nationalist who sees Russia's future greatness anchored in a powerful and respected Army commanded by an authoritarian leader.<sup>1</sup> Lebed's personal courage, obvious military talent and the independence of his judgments, combined with his integrity and his open contempt for political maneuvering, make him a rare figure in Russia today.

To many Russians disillusioned after the pain of market reform and the shrinking of their empire, Lebed's message was clear and soothing. He spoke in blunt, vivid images, with a sharpened instinct for what many Russians were yearning to hear. Lebed was also an outsider in Russian politics, winning nationwide popularity for his outspoken criticism of the government. As a military man, Lebed's greatest success was creating the image of himself as a leader who was not afraid to use "the fist." That is, when necessary, using unrestrained military force to achieve what he believed as the will of the Russian people.

As commander of the Tula Airborne Division, Lebed's tanks inadvertently became part of the barricades protecting the Russian parliament building during the infamous failed coup of 1991, and he earned the title "savior of Russia." In the newly independent republic of Moldova, Lebed's 14th Army halted a bloody conflict between Moldovan security forces and Russian separatists. Lebed was one of the few Russian generals who had the courage to condemn the unpopular war in Chechnya, and during his short time as national security chief, ended it.

Four years after the fall of communism, Russian democracy was still a fragile and recent institution. Lebed had even declared that a true democracy will not come to Russia "in my lifetime" -- a sentiment that was shared by even the most ardent but realistic Russian analysts in the Clinton administration, who anticipated that genuine democracy may be decades away.<sup>2</sup> Lebed's rise in politics was associated with the aspirations of the

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<sup>1</sup>Lebed emulates the former military dictator of Chile, General Augusto Pinochet, in this respect. See Joseph Albright and Marcia Kunstel, "Russian General Warns of New Arms Race," *Dayton Daily News*, 12 November 1995, p. 13A.

<sup>2</sup>Jon Stewart, "The Year of the Generals," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 October 1995, Worldview section, p. 8.

Russian people, and was a sign of Russia's continuing struggle to transform itself into a rule-of-law state.

In this land of wounded pride and lost identity, Lebed became something of a popular legend, a self-styled commander who promised to restore order out of chaos, resurrect Russia as a superpower and reassert partial state control over the economy. In a survey of Moscow residents conducted the month he left the army Lebed ranked first among politicians viewed as able to provide stability for the Russian people.<sup>3</sup> Opinion polls in the month before he left the office of national security chief indicated that Lebed was Russia's most trusted politician.<sup>4</sup>

Among the military, Lebed was an idol. It is probably true that no Russian general since 1917, besides Marshal Georgii Zhukov, was so popular as Lebed.<sup>5</sup> In 1957, similar to the way Yeltsin used Lebed, Nikita Khrushchev used Marshal Zhukov to defeat his opposition in the Communist Party and then removed him also in four months. The Zhukov precedent no doubt made Yeltsin and Lebed very nervous about each other, but unlike Zhukov, Lebed was open in his political ambitions for the highest office.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Russia: Privatization and Illegalization of Social and Political Life," *The Washington Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (Winter, 1996): 65.

<sup>4</sup>Opinion polls plotted Lebed's meteoric rise after entering politics, casting him as the man to beat in the succession battle to Yeltsin. Approval rating were issued in October 1996 by the respected All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Research. Forty percent of the nearly 2,500 people polled named Lebed the leader they most approve of, far ahead of the second-place figure, Communist Party leader Gennady A. Zyuganov, chosen by 16%. Prime Minister Viktor S. Chernomyrdin, Lebed's main challenger for succession, placed third with 14%, and Yeltsin finished fifth with only 11%. Source: Carol J. Williams, "Russian drawn to Both Sides of Maverick Lebed," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>5</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security*, Vol.4, No.3, (Autumn 1995), pp.417-437.

<sup>6</sup>The Moscow Times, 25 June 1996.

Alexander Lebed defied definitions. Some feared him as a Russian Napoleon dreaming of supreme power. Others saw him as a defender of Russia's new democracy. Still others considered him just a battle-hardened soldier turned skillful politician. Whoever he was, in just one year the former two-star general became one of the most important politicians in Russia and a powerful influence in the future of the nation.

Newspaper and magazine articles will be the main source of information for Lebed's views and statements. His background, experiences and beliefs will be summarized. Speeches and interviews will be analyzed to outline various policies and his political platform.

In Russia, the presidency dwarfs all other political institutions, and it is ultimately the president who determines the country's domestic and foreign policies.<sup>7</sup> If Alexander Lebed (or another nationalist candidate) is eventually elected president, it will have widespread impact on world affairs - though the impact may not be as severe as many Western analysts fear. It is important to understand, therefore, what he represents and from what base Lebed gains his popular support in order to deal with this kind of administration. Lebed may offer a window into what the future Russia will resemble.

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<sup>7</sup>With the Russian Constitution of 1994 the presidency became not only executive, but also independent legislature and judge. It is certainly at the limits of a strong presidential system and probably beyond them.

## II. WHO IS ALEXANDER LEBED?

### A. YOUTH

Alexander Ivanovich Lebed was born on 20 April 1950, in the industrial city of Novocherkassk in the Rostov region of southern Russia. He was born into a poor family with a working class background. Two generations of Lebed's family suffered under communism.

In 1937 his father, Ivan, was arrested for twice being late for work as a carpenter and spent two years in a labor camp.<sup>8</sup> With the outbreak of the war with Finland in 1939 he was sent from the camp to a penal battalion, and then to the Russo-Finnish front. During the war Ivan Lebed took part in the offensive on the Mannerheim fortifications. Lebed's father and grandfather fought for the Red Army when Nazi Germany invaded Russia in 1941, and both were wounded during the war. Ivan Lebed served in the army throughout the Second World War before being discharged in 1947. His son, Alexander, fondly described him as an extremely reserved man who used few words.<sup>9</sup> Ivan became a metalworker in Novocherkassk and died in 1978.

Ivan Lebed's son was named Alexander for good reason. It was the name of three of Russia's most famous czars, and his mother is a Cossack from the Don. The Cossacks constituted a paramilitary society employed by the Russians in the expansion of their empire. The Don Cossacks in particular were a major group of Cossacks who settled along the lower Don River in southwestern Russia during the 16th century and organized self-governing military communities. Most of the Don Cossacks were Great Russian in origin, but they mixed with Turco-Tatar people. In addition there were fugitives of

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<sup>8</sup> "MN file," *Moscow News*, 20 June 1996, and Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Anatol Lieven, "Gruff General Reveals Scars That Made Him," *Times* (London), 27 June 1996.

Ukrainian origin and a sizable body of Kalmyks (physically oriental in appearance).<sup>10</sup> Lebed admits to being part Ukrainian, but on first impression it is his Cossack stock that is readily apparent.<sup>11</sup> Novochoerkassk, situated on high ground upstream from the Don River delta, was the Cossack capital.

During the 19th century the Don Cossacks became elite cavalry troops in the Russian army and were often used to suppress peasant unrest and urban disturbances. After the Russian Revolutions of 1917 they sought to reestablish political autonomy and fought on the side of the White Russian armies. As a descendant of Cossack heritage, Lebed's martial policies are well rooted.

Even after Lebed was appointed as Yeltsin's National Security Adviser in 1996, his Cossack mother still lived in the house in Novochoerkassk where he was born. It was a small cottage without an inside bathroom or even running water.<sup>12</sup> The house was in a yard lined with cottages, sheds and kitchen gardens, shaded by chestnut trees, and littered with sleeping dogs and parts of broken-down cars. The dominant scent in the neighborhood was from the two communal bathrooms in the middle.<sup>13</sup> This is the poverty that Lebed knew as a child.

He stated in an interview that together with his parents they earned only a 10,000 ruble voucher, which was, in his words, "not enough to buy an iron." Sarcastically, he remarked that the small salary was their fair share of the people's wealth.<sup>14</sup> Reflecting on

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<sup>10</sup>Robert H. McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 14.

<sup>11</sup>William Safire, "Lebedtime Story," *New York Times*, 25 November 1996, p. A13.

<sup>12</sup>Anatol Lieven, "Gruff General Reveals Scars That Made Him," *Times* (London), 27 June 1996.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>"Russia Has Own 'Colin Powell'; Ex-Soviet General Has an Eye on Presidency," *Chicago Tribune*, New York Times News Service, Moscow, 15 October 1995, p. 14.

his upbringing, Lebed told CNN in Moscow that it was his wish to leave a great and wealthy country to his children.<sup>15</sup>

The image of Lebed as an ordinary Russian and not part of the new Russian elite was tremendously important in his electoral success. His 450-page autobiography, entitled *Za derzhavu obidno...* (It Is Shameful for a Great Power...) demonstrates that it was a carefully cultivated image, but one that appeared to correspond to reality.

One childhood event that was not mentioned in his autobiography would have led anyone to question the Draconian measures of Soviet Communism. Lebed claimed his own distaste for communism goes back to this childhood memory, but he did not mention it until after entering politics. On 2 June 1962, when he was 12 years old, workers in Novocherkassk staged a rare protest against rising prices and falling wages. Soviet troops guarding the local Communist headquarters opened fire, killing 24 people, and several others were subsequently executed.<sup>16</sup> The shooting became known as the "Novocherkassk massacre." A massive effort was put into keeping the protests and massacre secret, but Lebed's early life was in a city swamped with KGB officers and living in the shadow of 1962.<sup>17</sup>

The young Lebed was watching the demonstration with other boys, sitting in trees on the square. He had wriggled through a window because his mother had forbidden him to go out. When the troops opened fire, two of the boys were hit. Lebed's mother said, "When the shooting started he and his brother were sitting on the top of the tallest tree in front of our home. The tree was as old as our city. I was at work at the time. When their grandmother got there she locked them in the house and told them not to move."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>*Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 1, puts the total number of people killed at 70. Anatol Lieven, "Gruff General Reveals Scars That Made Him," *Times* (London), 27 June 1996.

<sup>17</sup>Mark Galeotti, "General Lebed - The Voice of Russia's Soldiers," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 1 (1 January 1995): 32.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Michael Specter, "The Wars of Aleksandr Ivanovich Lebed," *New York Times*, 13 October 1996, sec. 6, p. 44.

Nobody really knows how much young Lebed was affected by learning at the age of 12 that his government would kill innocent people to suppress unrest. Lebed has spoken of how the local commander committed suicide in protest of the killings and the misuse of the army. Lebed stated, "He was a true officer."<sup>19</sup>

But Lebed did not mention the event in his 1995 autobiography because he claimed it was insignificant. He later stated his memories could not serve as a basis of analysis, but admitted it was an act of "willfulness" on the part of the authorities. Lebed used this episode and the fact that his father went to a labor camp under Stalin for arriving late for work as reasons for his eventual siding with Yeltsin against the Communists.<sup>20</sup> Other evidence suggests that until he quit the Communist Party in 1990 he was a loyal subordinate and indeed a model soldier for the USSR.

Lebed went to an ordinary school in Novocherkassk, and Natalya Grishkova, a former teacher, described him as the star of his class.<sup>21</sup> Although he was a good student, he was not particularly studious. Lebed excelled instead at boxing and chess.<sup>22</sup> His school results suggest that he was certainly one of the brighter pupils. He got top marks in history, geography and physical education, and only slightly lower results in the rest.<sup>23</sup> Lebed stayed in Novocherkassk until graduating from secondary school in 1967.

At 16 his attempt to become a pilot was rejected by the Soviet air force academy because he had broken his nose in amateur boxing competitions. Two nose operations

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<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Anatol Lieven, "Gruff General Reveals Scars That Made Him," *Times* (London), 27 June 1996.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Specter, "The Wars of Aleksandr Ivanovich Lebed," *New York Times*, 13 October 1996, sec. 6, p. 44.

<sup>23</sup>Anatol Lieven, "Gruff General Reveals Scars That Made Him," *Times* (London), 27 June 1996.

followed, leaving no bone structure.<sup>24</sup> In his autobiography he claims this did not bother him: "I'm not a girl; and anyway, at that time, I thought that a real man only had to look a bit more sympathetic than a monkey." After the operations, Lebed was able to place his thumb on his nose, and pressing hard, make his battered profile look entirely flat.<sup>25</sup> In press interviews, Lebed would proudly use this trick as proof that he was a serious combatant, willing to get hurt in order to triumph.

Deciding to become a paratrooper, Lebed writes in his autobiography that his father told him he should try it first. Lebed bribed a guard at the local airport with six bottles of vodka, and on his first jump broke his back.<sup>26</sup> The injury did not stop him from pursuing his goal.

In 1969, at the age of 19, he gained early entry into the Ryazan Higher Airborne Assault Command School, an institution with a prestigious reputation in the military. There his favorite subjects were marksmanship and tank gunnery. He graduated in 1973, and spent 23 of the next 26 years in the army as a paratrooper. He was the first in his family to become a career military officer.

Lebed then served at Ryazan as a platoon leader and cadet company commander. While there he was under the immediate command of former Defense Minister Pavel Grachev. Lebed formed a longtime relationship with Grachev, but after the attempted coup of August, 1991, he became Lebed's nemesis, locked in a personal and political feud fought openly in the Russian media.

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<sup>24</sup>Joseph Albright and Marcia Kunstel, "The man who would lead Russia: Alexander Lebed warns that a new nuclear buildup may be necessary for his country's survival." *Vancouver Sun*, 10 November 1995, p. B3.

<sup>25</sup>Ann Leslie, "Whatever Russia's Election Result, Lebed is the Man to Watch," *Daily Mail*, 4 July 1996, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup>Michael Specter, "The Wars of Aleksandr Ivanovich Lebed," *New York Times*, 13 October 1996, sec. 6, p. 44.



## B. AFGHANISTAN

"Cossack glory means a dog's life." - Cossack saying<sup>27</sup>

The Afghan War was a defining event. Afghanistan discredited the Brezhnev regime and pushed into retirement the last of the World War II generals. This made way for what might be called the political generals, including former Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, former deputy defense minister Boris Gromov, Grachev and Lebed, all who served in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup>

From 1981 to 1982 Lebed commanded the first battalion of the 345th Separate Paratroops Regiment in Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> He quickly became known as a hardened and rugged soldier's soldier and was awarded the highest Soviet military decoration, Hero of the Soviet Union, for bravery in combat.<sup>30</sup> But the experience gave him an outward contempt for politicians of all kinds.<sup>31</sup> While commanding the battalion in Afghanistan, he served in a division again under Grachev, who was also decorated as a Hero of the Soviet Union.

Lebed was a fast learner in Afghanistan, witnessing numerous mistakes by the Soviet high command. They were lessons that he would later apply in a war that he saw

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<sup>27</sup> Robert H. McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 154.

<sup>28</sup> Rutskoi, Gromov, and Lebed all publicly repudiated their affiliation with Grachev, apparently a former comrade of all three of them. In various ways, all three demonstrated their hatred and contempt for the former defense minister. For a discussion of the Afghan veteran generals, see Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 417-37.

<sup>29</sup> "MN file," *Moscow News*, 20 June 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Alessandra Stanley, "Russian General Campaigns On Old-Time Soviet Values," *New York Times* 13 October 1995 p. A1.

<sup>31</sup> Steven Erlanger, "The Russians Have Come! When Will They Go?," *New York Times*, 21 May 1993, p. A4.

as a duplicate of Afghanistan's troubles, making peace in Chechnya. As he said, "Fools learn from their own mistakes, clever people learn from others"<sup>32</sup>

Reflecting on his tour of duty there, Lebed bitterly criticized the military's lack of preparation and repeated blunders in an interview for *Zavtra*:

Historically, it always happens in our country that the military prepares for the last war, without drawing any conclusions from the preceding one. Afghanistan, for instance, demonstrated the complete ineffectiveness of these kinds of preparations, when political goals are murky and vague and the military ones are unachievable altogether, and when a regimental commander would get a Hero of the Soviet Union award for 'exemplary conduct of regimental maneuvers.' It was a complete joke.<sup>33</sup>

Combat in Afghanistan failed to disillusion Lebed with the state he served. The era of Mikhail Gorbachev did. He was dismayed by democratization, which he felt threatened the army he loved.<sup>34</sup>

After Afghanistan, Lebed completed his senior service school education at the Frunze Military Academy. He graduated with distinction in 1985.

### C. DIVISION COMMAND EXPERIENCE

Of course I am an authoritarian person, because I am a general and I have been entrusted with a heavy and terrible right: to send people to their death. But throughout my career, I have tried to make sure that they return from hell alive.

-*Obshchaya gazeta*, November 1994

After graduating from the Frunze Academy, Lebed was appointed commander of an airborne regiment, and by 1988 he had already risen to command the elite 106th Guards Airborne Division in Tula, approximately one-hundred miles south of Moscow.

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<sup>32</sup>Interfax, Moscow, 28 December 1994.

<sup>33</sup>No doubt he was alluding to Grachev. Interview by Aleksandr Prokhanov, *Zavtra*, August 1995, pp. 1-3.

<sup>34</sup>James Meek, "Macho Lebed Exposes His Painful Shame," *Observer*, 21 July 1996, p. 24.

From 1985 to 1991 Lebed was sent throughout the USSR to engage in operations on the troubled Russian periphery putting down mainly ethnic unrest.<sup>35</sup> Lebed was the Soviet Union's hatchet man for several of the worst acts of repression directed against increasingly unruly non-Russian republics. It was also during these assignments that he earned his reputation as a crude and forceful leader, but these assignments were not operations that he would like the Russian public to remember.

Lebed's *spetsnaz*, or special operations troops were sent in to subdue the anti-Armenian massacres in Sumgait, Azerbaijan. He was then sent to put down demonstrations in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi in April 1989. Over twenty people were killed and dozens wounded when a "special assignment" unit under his command used sapper shovels and chemical weapons to suppress the unrest.<sup>36</sup> Lebed claimed in his autobiography that the demonstrators were crushed by the crowd, but Georgians say peaceful demonstrators were killed by shovels wielded by Soviet troops. Numerous accounts support the Georgian claim.

Also in his autobiography, Lebed maintains he flew in with reinforcements after the attacks had happened.<sup>37</sup> According to Lebed, the blame lay entirely with frightened local Communist bosses.<sup>38</sup> Lebed either disguised the truth or was ignorant of what was happening during an operation he personally commanded.

General Igor Rodionov was commander of the Transcaucasian Military District in 1989, and as Lebed's commander in Tbilisi took the ultimate responsibility for the massacre. He became head of the General Staff college and was a firm ally of Lebed

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<sup>35</sup>Stephen Bowers, "The Crisis in Moldova," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no 139, 23 July 1992, quoted in *Jane's Intelligence Review* 4, no. 11 (1 November 1992): 433.

<sup>36</sup>Ariel Cohen, "General Alexander Lebed: Russia's Rising Political Star," *Heritage Foundation Reports*, 26 September 1995, p. 1, and S. Frederick Starr, "A Russian Politician to Reckon With," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 December 1995, p. 19, and Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

<sup>37</sup>James Meek, "Macho Lebed Exposes His Painful Shame," *Observer*, 21 July 1996, p.24

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

during his rise in politics. Lebed put strong pressure on Yeltsin to include Rodionov in Yeltsin's administration after his reelection in 1996. The pressure was eventually successful, and Rodionov, once known as the notorious "butcher of Tbilisi," was appointed as Russia's Minister of Defense.

In January 1990, Lebed was sent to impose martial law in Baku, Azerbaijan as the communist role in Azerbaijan was collapsing. Again, he proved himself a ruthless commander. Using armored personnel carriers, his troops shot, stabbed to death and crushed more than 120 Azerbaijanis.<sup>39</sup> It was a Chechnya-like operation that killed at least 25 soldiers and plainly killed unarmed civilians. Lebed was eventually named by an Azerbaijani parliamentary commission as the individual who gave the soldiers the command to open fire on the demonstrators.<sup>40</sup>

Recalling those tense days and nights much later prompted Lebed to admit,

It was always the same: No written orders. No concrete task. No explanation of what 'order' means and how it was to be achieved. Never any explanation of the difference between martial law and a state of emergency. Give an order to shoot, and you're wrong. Don't give an order to shoot, and you're still wrong.<sup>41</sup>

These trying experiences continued to haunt Lebed, persuading him that he was betrayed by the civilian leadership.

A report by Helsinki Watch and Russian Memorial, two human rights groups, said later that ill-prepared troops used excessive force.<sup>42</sup> Instances of shooting at ambulances

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<sup>39</sup>Sergei Shargorodsky, "Ex-General a Threat or Boon to Russia's Democracy?" *Associated Press*, 22 June 1996, and Sergei Karkhanin, "Zigzag ataki," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 14 March 1995, p.1. and Stephen Bowers, "The Crisis in Moldova," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no 139, 23 July 1992, quoted in *Jane's Intelligence Review* 4, no. 11, (1 November 1992): 433.

<sup>40</sup>S. Frederick Starr, "A Russian Politician to Reckon With," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 December 1995, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup>Harriet Fast Scott, "Rise of the Afghantsi," *Air Force Magazine*, (August 1993): 33.

<sup>42</sup>Sergei Shargorodsky, "Ex-General a Threat or Boon to Russia's Democracy?" *Associated Press*, 22 June 1996.

and using bayonets against civilians were widely reported. In his book, Lebed gave only a sketchy description of the Baku events. He denied there were atrocities, but years later he blamed politicians for misusing the military. His defense was, "I am a sinner. There is no paratrooper general who is free of sin."<sup>43</sup>

A degree of ruthlessness, however, is apparent and even boasted about in his autobiography. Despite what happened in Novochoerkassk during his youth, he has expressed little pity for the civilian victims of Soviet operations in which he was involved and has tried to minimize these brutal acts.

#### **D. QUILTS COMMUNIST PARTY**

Lebed's real disillusionment about the government came in 1990. He had been a member of the Communist Party for 19 years, but entered public politics when the Soviet regime was collapsing. As a 40-year old division commander, he was given an honored spot on the Russian Communist Party's central committee, and sent as a delegate to the 28th Party Congress in Moscow. Lebed recalls in his memoir that "A double, a triple morality was running amok within the Party" and "All the authorities ceased to exist for me." During the congress, Lebed furiously asked Alexander Yakovlev, the so-called godfather of perestroika, "Just what do you believe in?"<sup>44</sup> The remark suggests that he was a more obstinate, conservatively principled communist than he would like today's Russia to believe, and that he was suspicious of reform and reformers. Ironically, it was a question that was later often asked of Lebed during his presidential campaign.

At the 28th Party Congress, Lebed met people he had previously only seen in pictures. When he looked them in the face, he said he saw a crowd of imbeciles, adding

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Mark Galeotti, "General Lebed - The Voice of Russia's Soldiers," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 1 (1 January 1995): 32.

that his view was "strengthened" by the failed coup attempt in 1991.<sup>45</sup> After attending two party conferences, he said he became tired of "screaming, rackets and petty bickering" and quit the Communist Party in 1990.<sup>46</sup> It is unknown whether Lebed quit because he no longer believed in the Party or simply because he saw communism was collapsing. From this point on, Lebed's sense of betrayal by those he served chronicled his career and served as a focus for his rise in Russian politics.

#### **E. LEBED'S FAMILY**

Lebed and his wife, Inna, have three children - a daughter and two sons. He met Inna, a red-headed former schoolteacher, when they were working in a local factory before he joined the army, and courted her for four years.<sup>47</sup> Almost in contradiction to the image of a hardened, professional soldier, he was fond of holding his wife by the hand in public. Inna, whom he complimented often, was known to always display a pleasant disposition even after months on the campaign trail.<sup>48</sup>

Alexander Zhilin, a military analyst and one of Lebed's old Afghan-war friends, once said that he wished people could see him as he was at home. He described Lebed as very loving and full of jokes, completely different from his public image. When Zhilin first visited him at home he expected to see a down trodden little wife under the thumb of a tough general - but it was absolutely the opposite case.

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<sup>45</sup>David Hoffman, "Maverick General Upstages Yeltsin; Top Presidential Candidate Promises to Restore Order," *Washington Post*, 21 October 1995, p. A01.

<sup>46</sup>Joseph Albright and Marcia Kunstel, "The man who would lead Russia: Alexander Lebed warns that a new nuclear buildup may be necessary for his country's survival." *Vancouver Sun*, 10 November 1995, p. B3.

<sup>47</sup>Ann Leslie, "Whatever Russia's Election Result, Lebed is the Man to Watch," *Daily Mail*, 4 July 1996, p. 24.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

According to Inna, Lebed is a warm-hearted husband and grandfather at home who enjoys singing Russian folk-songs and playing with his grandchildren.<sup>49</sup> "Papa," as she affectionately calls him, often helped her with housekeeping in their modest tower-blocked apartment in a Moscow suburb.

Although no longer a Communist, Lebed was unlike other former party members who expediently wrapped themselves in the patriotism of the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>50</sup> He said he remained an atheist, perhaps because for Lebed, Russia was "higher than everything."<sup>51</sup> Lebed has said he does not believe in God, but in his autobiography he asserts, "We are Russians and God is with us!"

Lebed, a name that means "swan" in Russian, speaks with a southern Russian accent similar to Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>52</sup> He traveled widely through the former Soviet Union on military assignments but did not experience the West until after his appointment as chief of national security. In his autobiography, he lamented that the United States, Germany and Japan were held up as "heroes" to Russians. He wrote, "Earlier we were overtaking and surpassing, and today we are following them." Lebed's resistance to Western influence was a consistent theme during his rise in politics, and he often blamed the West for Russia's wounded national pride.

#### **F. LEBED, YELTSIN AND THE FAILED COUP OF 1991**

I was tortured by the feeling that something big and important had passed me by and I had not seen it, looked at it, understood it. Now it was too late to work it out . . . I found myself an outsider among these unbridled festivities.

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "Russian General Campaigns On Old-Time Soviet Values," *New York Times* 13 October 1995 p. A1.

<sup>51</sup>John Morrison, "Russia's General Lebed - swan or ugly duckling?" *Reuters World Service*, 9 October 1995.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

-Lebed on the attempted coup of 1991, *Guardian*, 5 July 1996

Lebed played a leading role during the infamous failed coup of August 1991. As commander of the Tula Airborne Division, his actions during the coup attempt gained him his first widespread public attention. The significance of this event may come to be viewed as rivaling and, in a sense, reversing the effects of the Bolshevik coup which occurred nearly three quarters of a century previously.<sup>53</sup> Surprisingly, he says, he did not even know that hard-line communist forces were trying to depose Gorbachev until Yeltsin's aides told him late on the evening of the 19th, after a day of events had already unfolded<sup>54</sup>

During the coup attempt, Lebed's troops from Tula were moved into Moscow. The forces in Tula are known as the guardian of the southern approaches to Moscow and thus critical to Russian leaders. The commander of the Airborne Assault Forces at the time, Colonel-General Grachev, gave the order to Major-General Lebed, commander of the Airborne Assault Forces' Tula Division, to move his battalion toward the Russian parliament building, known as the "White House." The command had worded orders for the mission in vague terms, which could have resulted in either protection or arrest.<sup>55</sup>

Lebed never stormed the building. Instead, his division parked around the building, turned around, and prevented the plotters from firing at Yeltsin's headquarters. His tanks became part of the barricades protecting the building. Apparently unknowing to him, Lebed derailed the plot, and earned the title "savior of Russia."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993), 186.

<sup>54</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "Russian General Campaigns On Old-Time Soviet Values," *New York Times* 13 October 1995 p. A1.

<sup>55</sup>"Lebed as Political 'Terminator'," FBIS, 30 May 1995, p. 4, JPRS Report 95UM0456C from Moscow *Kuranty*.

<sup>56</sup>Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.



According to John Dunlop, it is unknown whether Lebed's forces arrived to storm the "White House" or to protect it.<sup>57</sup> In an interview with the pro-democracy Interfax News Service, Lieutenant General Podkolozin of the paratroopers stated: "The paratroopers are neither against the Russian government nor against the provisional government...Our task is not to permit disorder, chaos, or hooliganism."<sup>58</sup>

There are differing accounts of precisely what happened. Lebed has insisted that any use of military force in the streets of Moscow "would have been guaranteed 100 percent to lead to large-scale bloodshed," which would have "engulfed the country in civil war," something it was "imperative to prevent."<sup>59</sup> In his autobiography, Lebed attributes the troop movements to confusion about the orders he was given. He also never accepted praise as a defender of the parliament building. In early 1995, he stated, "I never defended the 'White House.' I defended common sense. They tried to push me, a Russian general, to shoot my own people in the capital of my own state. No such force exists that would compel me to do this."<sup>60</sup>

Lebed and Grachev publicly debated the role each played in these momentous events that changed the course of their nation. Lebed says that he was ordered by Grachev to take up a position near the Russian "White House." According to Lebed, he informed Yeltsin that his troops had arrived to prevent fighting and then reported to Grachev that he intended to protect the seat of the Russian president.

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<sup>57</sup>John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993), 241.

<sup>58</sup>*Korichnevyy putch krasnykh* (Moscow: "Tekst," 1991), p. 75, from John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993), 241.

<sup>59</sup>"Anti-Coup Leaders: The Men of the Future?" *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 1991.

<sup>60</sup>David Hoffman, "Maverick General Upstages Yeltsin; Top Presidential Candidate Promises to Restore Order," *Washington Post*, 21 October 1995, p. A01.

While Grachev insists he supported Yeltsin all along, Lebed claims that Grachev waffled between the putschists and the president until the last minute<sup>61</sup> Grachev, he said, had prostituted himself by balancing between the two sides, finally coming down on Yeltsin's side.<sup>62</sup> During the coup attempt, Lebed also reportedly got into a heated argument with General Alexander Rutskoi, later Yeltsin's vice president and leader of the attempted coup of 1993.

Lebed described the first 24 hours of the coup as a situation of mass confusion. The once mighty Soviet Army was collapsing. At one point, unable to find his division and driving around Moscow in a van without a radio, Lebed said he had to make a call from a pay phone to headquarters and was told to call back in 15 minutes for the coordinates.<sup>63</sup> According to Lebed, General Grachev appeared to be following orders to prepare an attack on the White House. It was then that he told Grachev, his commanding officer, that he was ready to carry out any order, but he "must understand its meaning."<sup>64</sup>

Throughout the day, when hundreds of thousands of people were in the streets and his superiors seemed to be acting so suspiciously, Lebed said he never turned on a radio, stopped a passer-by or picked up a newspaper.<sup>65</sup> Although Lebed has the reputation as a self-styled independent, he apparently did not seek his own answers to what was happening.

Neither the coup plotters nor the Russian government were certain of the loyalty of the troops that had surrounded and sealed off the "White House." When asked by a

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<sup>61</sup>Alexander Nikolayev, "Pavel Grachev-Alexander Lebed: Du'el na vylet," manuscript, Moscow, 1995, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup>John Morrison, "Many Russians See Tough General as Next Head of State," *Reuters, Limited*, 10 October 1995.

<sup>63</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "Russian General Campaigns On Old-Time Soviet Values," *New York Times* 13 October 1995 p. A1.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

journalist whether Lebed's troops had in fact come over to the side of the Russian government, General Kobets, chief of the defenses of the "White House," responded: "I would not draw that conclusion."<sup>66</sup> Defense Minister Yazov appeared to consider the loyalties of the troops a problem. Early the next morning, he ordered them withdrawn "because he considered the troops unreliable."<sup>67</sup>

Lebed was widely praised by reformers when the coup collapsed, and is recognized in Western journalism as a protector of democracy. Lebed quickly disappointed his admirers, however, saying he "could not care less for democracy," but, being a Russian general, could not bring himself to kill Russians. It must also be remembered that Lebed never received the order to open fire, so it is unknown how he would have actually responded.

Shortly after the coup failed, Lebed was appointed deputy commander-in-chief of the Airborne Forces of Russia. President Yeltsin publicly thanked him for defending the Russian "White House" against the hard-liners behind the coup attempt. In his memoir, Lebed recalled how he was celebrated as a hero for his part in defeating the coup.<sup>68</sup> His overwhelming feeling, however, was the rage he felt at being manipulated. At the time of the coup, Lebed did not fully understand the significance of the event, and being kept in the dark infuriated him.<sup>69</sup> These events further alienated Lebed from the political authorities for whom he ultimately served.

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<sup>66</sup>John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993), 242.

<sup>67</sup>Stuart H. Loory and Ann Imse, eds., *Seven Days That Shook the World* (Atlanta, Turner Publishing, 1991) from John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), 242.

<sup>68</sup>Journalist Aleksandr Pogonchenkov argues that the possible defection of Lebed's battle-tested battalion to Yeltsin's side caused the coup plotters to delay storming the "White House" for a critical twenty-four hours. See *Demokraticheskaya Rossiya*, nos. 22-23 (August 23-September 4, 1991), from John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993), 241.

<sup>69</sup>James Meek, "Lebed Afraid of Missing out on Glory," *Guardian*, 5 July 1996, p. 16.

Lebed was later rewarded with command of the 14th army in Moldova. Whether this command was considered a reward or not can today be disputed. Lebed commanded the 14th Army in a troublesome three-year peacekeeping mission in the Trans-Dniester region of Moldova. Shortly after his arrival in 1992, he imposed order and arranged a lasting peace agreement between ethnic Russian separatists in Trans-Dniester and the new Moldovan government. Lebed preserved the Russian presence in the region, and if it had been a different commander, the Russians surely would have been ousted. Because of his tough public stance against Yeltsin administration policies during these years, however, Lebed's highly-decorated military career was forced to an end.



### **III. THE FIGHTING GENERAL: LEBED IN MOLDOVA**

From June, 1992 until June, 1995 General Lebed served as commander of the Russian 14th Army in Moldova. There he became not only one of the Russian army's most respected officers, but a popular political figure as well. Admired by his troops, he was both a symbol of positive military attitude in a depleted and disheartened army and a champion of ethnic Russians marooned across the former empire by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Lebed's controversial position as commander of the 14th Army led to his rise in political power. After Moldova, Lebed was elected to a seat in the Russian parliament and was appointed as Yeltsin's national security adviser after finishing third in the 1996 presidential election. Yet, it was in Moldova where Lebed first gained political prominence. It was in Moldova that Russian Foreign Ministry officials accused Lebed of making policy totally independent from his superiors in Moscow. His nationalist convictions and own ambitions defined his army's positions. Though he had upset relations between Russia and Moldova from the beginning, Lebed became just too popular for the Defense Ministry to let go.

Lebed continually made abrasive statements against the Moldovan government, the Yeltsin government and the Trans-Dniester government. His popularity and reputation for integrity became more prominent as his anti-government position became well documented in the media. For two years Lebed was acting practically independently of Russian civilian leadership. His strong criticism of the war in Chechnya and what he called the "degradation" of the armed forces became a major problem to the defense minister, General Pavel S. Grachev, and eventually to President Yeltsin. In July, 1995, he retired from the Army because of Yeltsin's conduct of the Chechnya war and Moscow's plans to reassign him to a lesser post. By this time, he was known all over the world and had become the man on horseback.

## A. BACKGROUND

The Russian 14th Army was deployed in Moldova to guard the Soviet Union's south-western flank. It has occupied the region since the Soviet republic of Moldavia was formed in 1945. The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was created largely from land annexed from Romania after the Second World War. This territory was part of what was known as Bessarabia, which had belonged to Romania since 1918. With the collapse of the USSR, the new nation of Moldova was declared. It became the smallest but most densely inhabited of any of the former Soviet republics, with a total population of 4.4 million people.<sup>70</sup> Moldova is a land-locked country bounded by Romania on the west and by Ukraine on the north, east and south.

Towards the end of Soviet control, nationalists in the Moldovan capital of Chisinau (formerly Kishinev), pushed forward the idea of reunification with Romania. In the process of de-Sovietization, they Latinized the alphabet once again, made Romanian the state language and adopted a flag and state seal almost identical to Romania's.

This reunification effort drove the old Russian supporters across the Dniester river, where the Soviets had put most of the industry and where the 14th Army was already based. The region was populated mainly by ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. In September 1990, with the support of the 14th Army, the Trans-Dniester Soviet Socialist Republic was first declared and laid the groundwork for the upcoming war.<sup>71</sup>

Russia wanted an autonomous status for the 750,000 people of the Trans-Dniester republic within Moldova, with accompanying guarantees regarding the right of the region to determine its own form of government.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, Russia made it clear to

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<sup>70</sup>In 1993 Moldova's average population density was 340 persons per square mile. From "Fact Sheet: Moldova," *1994 U.S. Department of State Dispatch* 5, no. 18, 2 May 1994.

<sup>71</sup>Steven Erlanger, "The Russians Have Come! When Will They Go?," *New York Times*, 21 May 1993, p. A4.

<sup>72</sup>Howard Witt, "Leninist Haven Means Troubles for Russians," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 October 1993, p. 1.

Moldova that Russia would support the Trans-Dniester right to self-determination in the event of any Moldovan move to reunite with Romania. In 1992, Trans-Dniester revolted against the government in Chisinau and declared a semi-sovereign state, complete with its own government, passports, postal system, and capital city in Tiraspol.<sup>73</sup> It refused to recognize the authority of the Moldovan government, although it did not enjoy official international recognition from a single world government, including that of Russia.

After months of argument, Russia's president Boris Yeltsin agreed only in principle to a withdrawal of the 14th Army from the region. The efforts of Russia and Moldova to work out a diplomatic solution, however, were occurring faster than other events in the Trans-Dniester region. The local command of the 14th Army, with support from the newly established Russian Ministry of Defense, and at times the open sympathy of a majority of the Russian parliament, pursued its own policy of providing weapons and military assistance to the Russian community in the Trans-Dniester region.

Fighting between Dniester Russians and Moldovans became worse in the spring and summer of 1992. Yeltsin's government came under increasing criticism from the military for its failure in defending the interests of Russians in Moldova. Protecting the interests of ethnic Russians or "Russian-speakers" was one of the chief justifications offered by Moscow for its involvement in the Trans-Dniestran war and remained a favored argument among those such as Lebed who supported a continued Russian military presence. Of Moldova's 560,000 ethnic Russians, however, fewer than a third actually lived in Trans-Dniester.<sup>74</sup> Moldova was the first shot in Russia's claim to hegemony over the Near Abroad in the name of protecting the 25 million Russian speakers outside Russia.

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<sup>73</sup>Bruce D. Porter and Carol R. Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire: Russia and the 'Near Abroad'" *Washington Quarterly* 17, no. 3, (Summer 1994): 72.

<sup>74</sup>Charles King, "Eurasia Letter: Moldova with a Russian Face," *Foreign Policy*, 22 December 1994, p. 106.



## B. LEBED APPOINTED COMMANDING OFFICER

In late June of 1992, then Major-General Alexander Lebed was appointed to command the 14th Army, a force at the time of more than 10,000 troops<sup>75</sup> It was believed that appointing a hard-liner like Lebed could give the army more muscle to react to ethnic conflicts along the many fringes of the former Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup> His nomination as commanding officer of the 14th Army put him in charge of one of the largest former Soviet arsenals, which could have been used in the event of an attempt to revive the Soviet Union. Some Russian generals have explored the idea of selling arms from this depot in the Balkans and the Middle East.<sup>77</sup>

The appointment could have meant a change in the tactics of the Russian armed forces in Trans-Dniester. The Russian newspaper *Izvestia* said, "So far, it is difficult to say just exactly what will be changed." However, it is obvious that they [Russian armed forces] will stop being "only on the defensive, only victims of sneak attacks and raids."<sup>78</sup>

Lebed's appointment also came right after the meeting of the Presidents of Russia and the Ukraine, and it was assumed that the two leaders agreed to coordinate the actions of the 14th Army.<sup>79</sup> Lebed replaced Major-General Yuri Netkachev who held the position

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<sup>75</sup>Figure from Mark Galeotti, "General Lebed - The Voice of Russia's Soldiers," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 1, (1 January 1995): 32. During Lebed's assignment, the size of the 14th Army steadily decreased. According to Candice Hughes, "Blunt General Waits in Wings of Chechen Crisis," *Associated Press*, 11 January 1995, the army had only about 2,000 soldiers, but still had immense stockpiles of arms and ammunition.

<sup>76</sup>Vanora Bennett, "Russia Names Hard-liners For Top Army Posts," *Reuters Library Report*, 29 June 1992.

<sup>77</sup>Ariel Cohen, "General Alexander Lebed: Russia's Rising Political Star," *Heritage Foundation Reports*, 26 September 1995, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup>Victor Litovkin "14th Army: New Commander -- New Tactics of Neutrality," *Russian Press Digest*, 29 June 1992.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

for only five months. Netkachev was believed to have been sympathetic to the idea of a Moldovan army<sup>80</sup>

Viktor Paramoshin, a retired colonel who served in military counterintelligence, saw the 14th Army appointment as a calculated attempt to derail Lebed's career:

The decision on Lebed's further assignment was made very carefully. On the one hand, he had to serve outside of Russia. On the other, in a place where he would get 'burned' fast. According to our intelligence reports, we expected the situation between Moldova and Trans-Dniester to break out into armed conflict. It's likely that Grachev thought Lebed would actually be a catalyst, instigating an international scandal, which would be his undoing. This was a fatal mistake on Grachev's part. He gravely underestimated the capabilities of his primary, future rival.<sup>81</sup>

The fighting in Trans-Dniester grew more intense. Clashes in the town of Bendery between 19-21 June took several hundred mainly civilian lives. The leaders of Russia and Moldova finally agreed to have the 14th Army put a stop to it, and in a meeting where Lebed was present, an agreement was signed on 6 July 1992.<sup>82</sup> But fighting in the region continued.

### **C. LEBED'S STAND AGAINST MOSCOW**

The Moldovan crisis was deeply affected by the presence of Lebed. Shortly after his appointment, in July of 1992, fighting along the Dniester River valley escalated to the highest level since the conflict began. Lebed accused the Yeltsin government of

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<sup>80</sup>"Major General Alexander Lebed, Commander 14th Army in Moldova," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 4, no. 9 (1 September 1992): 433.

<sup>81</sup>Alexander Zhilin, "For the Soul of the Russian Army," *Moscow Times*, 29 June 1996.

<sup>82</sup>Anatoliy Kholodyuk, "Dnestr Cease-fire Agreed By All Sides," ITAR-TASS, 8 July 1992 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 9 July 1992.

"wallowing in the mire of policies that were incomprehensible" and making concessions to a fascist regime in Moldova that was engaged in acts of genocide against Russians there.<sup>83</sup>

The statement, which was given prominent coverage by all of the press in Moscow, represented, in the words of a commentator for the pro-government daily newspaper *Izvestia*, both an act of insubordination to civilian authority and an ultimatum to the Yeltsin government to abandon the current policy of negotiations with Moldova.<sup>84</sup> No official reprimand of Lebed was issued, however, and Lebed remained as commander of the 14th Army.<sup>85</sup>

During the same week, Lebed also accused the Moldovan government of being "illegitimate." He referred to the Moldovan defense minister as a "cannibal" and denounced the "shadow of fascism" hanging over Moldova.<sup>86</sup> In an extraordinary outburst, Lebed accused the Moldovan president, Mircea Snegur, of being a fascist and said he should be hanged.<sup>87</sup>

This statement appeared the day after the presidents of Russia and Moldova agreed at a CIS summit in Moscow, along with eight other presidents of former Soviet republics, to send a multinational peace force into Moldova.<sup>88</sup> The Moldovan parliament immediately demanded that Moscow send a commission to Moldova to investigate the

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<sup>83</sup>"Pridnestrove, Iul, 1992," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 10 July 1992.

<sup>84</sup>"Lebed Remarks from 'Ultimatum' to Yeltsin," FBIS-SOV, 9 July 1992, pp. 32-33, from Moscow *Izvestiya*, 8 July 1992.

<sup>85</sup>"Army Commander Says Troops Must Stay in Dniester," Moscow Radio, 7 April 1993 in FBIS-SOV, 8 April 1993.

<sup>86</sup> Steven Erlanger, "The Russians Have Come! When Will They Go?," *New York Times*, 21 May 1993, p. A4.

<sup>87</sup> David Hearst, "General Compromises Moldova Peace Effort," *Guardian*, 8 July 1992, p. 8.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

consequences of Lebed's words because his allegations severely compromised the efforts of Russian diplomacy.

Lebed's bold partisanship for the Trans-Dniesterians created a situation where Russian troops were almost sent in as part of a force to keep other Russian troops under his command from fighting the Moldovans. Worse still, his statement was published on the day that another senior Russian officer, Major-General Vladimir Semyonov, commander of Russian land forces, flew to Moldova to begin implementing the peacekeeping plan.<sup>89</sup>

That summer Yeltsin refused to sign the promotion of Lebed to lieutenant-general. This was probably connected with the president's displeasure at Lebed's harsh remarks at his first news conference as the 14th Army commander.<sup>90</sup> Lebed was the only one of the top Russian generals recommended for promotion by the Ministry of Defense at that time to be passed over for promotion. Yeltsin later promoted Lebed in September of 1992.<sup>91</sup>

#### **D. LEBED ENDS THE CONFLICT**

Lebed received intelligence in early July of 1992 that the Moldovans would soon move their forces into Trans-Dniester, and he began to take precautions with his 14th Army. When the Moldovan forces moved into Trans-Dniester, Lebed attempted to clarify his role by contacting his immediate superior, General Grachev. According to Lebed and to his top aide, Colonel Mikhail Bergman, Grachev could not be raised on any of the special communications channels.<sup>92</sup> Lebed claimed "he had simply disappeared," and was

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>"Yeltsin reportedly blocks 14th Army chief's promotion," *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, Moscow, 18 July 1992 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 25 July 1992.

<sup>91</sup>"Yeltsin promotes 14th Army Commander Lebed," *Mayak radio*, Moscow, 18 September 1992 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 21 September 1992.

<sup>92</sup>Alexander Zhilin, "For the Soul of the Russian Army," *Moscow Times*, 29 June 1996.

unreachable for an extended period of time.<sup>93</sup> In the meantime, the situation developed rapidly.

News agencies began reporting that Trans-Dniestrans forces had inflicted a "crippling blow" on Moldovan units.<sup>94</sup> In fact, such Trans-Dniestrans forces did not exist. In reality, it was Lebed's 14th Army that launched three powerful artillery barrages against the Moldovans. According to Russian journalist Alexander Zhilin,

One targeted an attempted river crossing, burning up most of the Moldovan equipment. A second came down on a nearby area. At this point the Moldovan defense minister, experiencing heavy losses, decided to withdraw and concentrate the remainder of his forces in one region to regroup and make another attempt in the morning. Another artillery barrage was launched in the night in the same area. After this, the Moldovan forces lost their will to continue the military drive.<sup>95</sup>

Lebed ended the region's fighting in a single day with three barrages of artillery. Trans-Dniester President Igor Smirnov and his defense ministry - seven men in all - took credit for the victory, and Lebed kept his silence. Lebed demonstrated that he was willing to use deadly force to protect what he believed was Russian national interest.

On 25 July 1992, Lebed set up buffer posts between Moldovan government and Trans-Dniester forces by moving his Russian troops into Bendery. Lebed halted most fighting between the two sides before the arrival of the full-scale joint peacekeeping force the next week.<sup>96</sup> Three thousand people had already been killed and tens of thousands were wounded in the war. This was the first Russian joint peacekeeping force on the territory of the former Soviet Union, and Lebed was regarded by many in Russia as a hero

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>"Major General Alexander Lebed, Commander 14th Army in Moldova," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 4, no. 9 (1 September 1992): 433.

for his role in stopping the civil war and imposing the cease-fire.<sup>97</sup> It turned out Russia had a more muscular concept of peace keeping than in the West.

Lebed promised that if Russia's 14th Army was attacked, it would hit back: "I am no Jesus Christ. If I am slapped, I will not turn the other cheek."<sup>98</sup> The general also remarked that "Russia has always helped and will continue to help Dniester," but confirmed that, in regards to the Trans-Dniester republic's domestic problems, the 14th Army remained neutral.<sup>99</sup> Lebed later claimed that, "My units stopped the war, and I provided for the introduction of peacekeeping forces while the politicians made up their minds, which they took an inadmissibly long time to do."<sup>100</sup>

Newspapers picked up on Lebed's famous quotation: "We have done enough running, like goats after carrots, it's time to get on with the task in hand."<sup>101</sup> With conviction, Lebed began negotiations with the Moldovans. After Lebed's menacing statements and artillery barrages the Moldovan leadership accepted fundamental concessions. General Lebed earned the fame of a peacemaker and the title of "Man of the Year" in Trans-Dniester.

Lebed was voted Man of Year in Trans-Dniester by readers of the *Dniesterovsky Meridian* newspaper. Earlier, Lebed was granted honorary citizenship of Trans-Dniester. The Russian newspaper *Pravda* claimed, "The war in Trans-Dniester ground to a halt with Lebed assuming command of the [14th] army, because people on the other bank of the Dniester realized this man will stand up for the people and will not allow any murder to go

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<sup>97</sup> Howard Witt, "Leninist Haven Means Troubles For Russians," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 October 1993, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta in Russian Press Digest*, 26 August 1992, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Steven Erlanger, "The Russians Have Come! When Will They Go?," *New York Times*, 21 May 1993, p. A4.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander Kakotkin, "General Lebed fails to justify hopes," *Moscow News*, 6 August 1993.

unpunished."<sup>102</sup> Admired widely by his troops, Lebed regained the morale and the credibility of the 14th Army as a capable military force.

#### **E. LEBED'S POPULARITY GROWS**

"I'm a cat that likes to walk by itself." - *Economist* (London), 28 August 1993

All across the former Soviet Union, people began to hear about a tough, incorruptible general who had saved the Trans-Dniester Republic and was prepared to save Russia. Lebed seemed to promise that the empire would be restored and against all odds "the great state would exist."<sup>103</sup> If presidential elections or another August coup occurred, Lebed would have "entered the Kremlin on a white horse."<sup>104</sup>

Lebed's troops were calling him Papa, and he became a rare symbol of military vigor in a broken and demoralized Russian army.<sup>105</sup> More importantly, he became one of the most forceful and effective champions of the millions of ethnic Russians stranded in new states across the former Soviet empire.

During 1993, Lebed continued to speak out against the Yeltsin government, which had begun negotiations with Moldova on a schedule to withdraw the 14th Army.<sup>106</sup> In a speech in early January of 1993, Lebed suggested that the dismantled monument to Feliks Dzerzhinsky in Moscow be replaced by one to US President George Bush, and called the

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<sup>102</sup> Ivan Boltovsky, "Lebed Looks Falcon -- Man Of Year," *Pravda*, in *Russian Press Digest*, 5 January 1993, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> Alexander Kakotkin, "General Lebed fails to justify hopes," *Moscow News*, 6 August 1993.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Specter, "The Wars of Aleksandr Ivanovich Lebed," *New York Times*, 13 October 1996, sec. 6, p. 44.

<sup>106</sup> "Army Commander Says Troops Must Stay in Dniester," FBIS-SOV, 8 April 1993, p. 20, from Moscow Radio, 7 April 1993.

US ambassador to Moldova, Mary Pendleton, "a mediocre woman" for having rejected his invitations to visit the "Dniester Republic."<sup>107</sup>

Defense Minister Grachev personally cautioned Lebed:

I have given additional written instructions to General Lebed indicating that political statements in whatever form and at whatever forums they were made are intolerable, whether addressed to the Moldovan leadership or to Moldova, as a whole. As a commander of an army he must carry out his immediate duties: maintain the combat readiness of this army and not to allow provocations to happen especially the capture of materiel and armaments. I attribute General Lebed's lapses to the difficult situation in which he finds himself.<sup>108</sup>

Lebed humiliated Grachev by sending messages to Moscow insisting he not interfere with the business of the 14th Army. When the American United Nations representative, Madeleine Albright, said that Washington wanted the 14th Army to withdraw, Lebed responded, "It's time all those uninvited advisers got a boot in the behind."<sup>109</sup>

Lebed continued to foster the reputation for being blunt and outspoken. He insisted there was a relationship between the military and politics, saying, "It is nonsense to say the Army must stay out of politics. The housing problem is politics. Transferring officers to other armies is politics. Transfer to a new post is politics. The relationship to the Army in a number of regions is pure politics."<sup>110</sup>

In the meantime, Moldova discontinued attempts to join Romania and instead tried to stop the independence movement of the Trans-Dniester Republic. Trans-Dniester officials insisted on retaining their own currency and army. They wanted an equal

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<sup>107</sup>"Trans-Dniester to offer Russian citizenship," *Ukrainian Weekly* 61, no. 3, 17 January 1993, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup>"General Lebed Is Back In The News," *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, 31 August 1992.

<sup>109</sup>David Remnick, "The War for the Kremlin," *New Yorker*, 22 July 1996, p. 52.

<sup>110</sup>Harriet Fast Scott, "Rise of the Afghantsi," *Air Force Magazine*, August 1993, p. 33.



"confederation" with Moldova, while somehow becoming "an independent and sovereign subject of international law." Moldovan officials regarded this idea as absurd.<sup>111</sup>

Moldovan officials believed Lebed was the reason for Trans-Dniester's continued drive for independence. Ion Botnaru, the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Moldova, said Lebed behaved like the governor of a Russian province, not like a general temporarily on foreign soil. In the spring of 1993, Lebed even drafted young men from Tiraspol-- although they were no longer Soviet nor Russian citizens.

Lebed insisted there was nothing unusual about doing this, claiming that there had been a Russian Army in the region for 200 years, and that 47 percent of his officers were local.<sup>112</sup> With 8,000 troops, the 14th Army was far more combat ready than Moldova's entire national army of 9000 men.<sup>113</sup> Moldovan officials were afraid that Lebed was supporting the Trans-Dniester Republic not because it was an "historically Russian land" but rather because it was an excuse not to move the 14th Army back into Russia. Trans-Dniester became a starting point for Lebed's rise in politics, and a firm base for his support.

Yeltsin once said that he wanted more tough, young generals like Lebed, who were popular with their men. When Lebed, however, was asked to whom or to what he owed his overriding loyalty, he did not give the obvious answer - to my supreme commander, the president of Russia. Instead, Lebed would assert, "I'm a cat that likes to walk by itself." He explained what this means: "Theoretically we are under the orders of the commander-in-chief of ground forces in Moscow. In practice, we take decisions

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<sup>111</sup> Steven Erlanger, "In Ex-Soviet Lands, Russian Army Can Be a Protector or an Occupier," *New York Times*, 30 November 1993, p. A1.

<sup>112</sup> "The Threat That Was," *Economist* (London), 28 August 1993, p. 17.

<sup>113</sup> Size of army comparisons are from Bruce D. Porter and Carol R. Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire: Russia and the 'Near Abroad'" *Washington Quarterly* 17, no. 3, (Summer 1994): 72, and Mark Galeotti, "General Lebed - The Voice of Russia's Soldiers," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 1, (1 January 1995): 32.

here." These decisions were guided by a simple principle: "Don't touch me, or the families of my officers, and I'll do nothing to you. Touch me and I'll hit you -- hard." <sup>114</sup>

As an example of Lebed's concern for the welfare of his men, he began building nine apartment blocks to give every officer in his army quarters. Families were able to move into only two of the buildings, and the rest stood unfinished. Lebed said he received only 3.8 billion rubles of the 18 billion rubles the government promised for housing construction in 1995.<sup>115</sup> The rest of the effort was found locally. About 400 people, all officers and their families, lived in the shabby buildings "teeming with cats and filled with kitchen smells wafting through the corridors."<sup>116</sup> Two days a week no one in the buildings had hot water, yet Lebed lived at the quarters himself with his wife and their dog. His three-room apartment, though the most luxurious in the building was still cramped.

Besides providing his own food and shelter for his troops, Lebed's 14th Army demonstrated their independence in other ways. Supposedly a peacekeeping force, the army was not really neutral at all. They helped to prop-up the Trans-Dniester Republic, perhaps to repay the local population for their assistance with quartering the army. Vladimir L. Bodnar, first deputy chairman of the Trans-Dniester parliament, admitted, "It deterred the Moldovan side and it helped stabilize this side." <sup>117</sup>

Lebed became visibly bitter with the Moscow leadership. During this time he said:

Politicians start wars, but it's young men who wash themselves with blood because of the politicians' shortsightedness. Now, everyone thinks he's a strategist, and 10 years later, all the strategists who were never there and never saw action or ate putrid goat think it was simple. But history turns in one direction only, and you can't get it back. You can only draw conclusions.

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<sup>114</sup>"The Threat That Was," *Economist* (London), 28 August 1993, p. 17.

<sup>115</sup>Leonid Bershidsky, "Protesters Blockade Lebed Replacement," *Moscow Times*, 17 June 1995.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup>Steven Erlanger, "The Russians Have Come! When Will They Go?," *New York Times*, 21 May 1993, p. A4.

Lebed's distrust in the civilian government he was supposed to be supporting became readily apparent, but the leadership feared taking action to replace him. During these infant days of Russian democracy, Yeltsin desperately wanted to appease the military. If he had dismissed the popular Lebed the conservative backlash might have buried the president.

Lebed's reputation for integrity grew. Moldova's Ambassador to Moscow, A. Tsarak, said in May of 1993, "As for General Lebed, ... he seems to have a very strict idea of an officer's honor. I do not believe that he is acting at somebody's bidding. He is not the sort of man that can be made to act against his convictions."<sup>118</sup> Lebed created an image of himself as a man who was extremely honest and not afraid with "soldier frankness" to tell the truth to anybody.<sup>119</sup>

Quickly, Lebed developed a reputation as a crusader for justice. Lebed sensed this and tried to strengthen it. He openly struck out at what he saw as corruption among Trans-Dniester authorities. He regularly exposed the questionable dealings that involved the republic's ministers, and even its president, Smirnov.<sup>120</sup> He claimed he was really trying to prevent corrupt officers from selling off weapons to Middle Eastern terrorists.<sup>121</sup> For ordinary people in the post-Soviet era, who saw themselves as being robbed by everyone from the government and the police to speculators and the Mafia, the idea of social justice was very attractive. This was one source of Lebed's growing popularity.

Lebed was a demanding general who was known to emphasize problems he saw with the forces being constructed in Moldova. "The Moldovans are forming an army, but things don't get ahead. The soldiers booze or are 'on the run.' Their army simply lacks fuel.

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<sup>118</sup> "Dniester hostilities not likely to resume," *Russian Press Digest*, 28 May 1993, p. 12.

<sup>119</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no. 3, (Autumn 1995): 430.

<sup>120</sup> Alexander Zhilin, "For the Soul of the Russian Army," *Moscow Times*, 29 June 1996.

<sup>121</sup> S. Frederick Starr, "A Russian Politician to Reckon With," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 December 1995, p. 19.

The Popular Front has lost its positions. By contrast, I keep my army in intense training -- there will be no repetition of those events."<sup>122</sup> To Lebed, his reputation as a strong leader depended on the success of the peace agreement.

Throughout this time, almost all Western accounts of the Trans-Dniester Republic described the Russian 14th Army as a maverick force acting without authority from Moscow. Lebed was portrayed as a loner who was using the conflict in the Trans-Dniester region as an excuse not to remove his forces to Russian soil.<sup>123</sup> Russian officials did not offer anything else to Western reporters to change their opinions.

The overwhelming evidence in statements and interviews seems to show that Lebed was acting like a maverick and independent. Evidence surfaced, however, that the 14th Army may have been acting from the beginning under orders from its superiors in the Russian military and with the unconfirmed approval of Yeltsin's government. Lt. Gen. Valerii Manilov, the military spokesman for the CIS command, early in 1993 informed a Western audience that the 14th Army had not taken "a single step" without explicit approval from Moscow.<sup>124</sup> In August, when Lebed announced his candidacy for the Trans-Dniester Supreme Soviet, he made the announcement in Moscow, while in town for meetings with the Defense Ministry. And in October, as directed by a decree signed by Yeltsin himself, nearly 200 servicemen from the 14th Army were honored with official medals of the Russian Federation at a ceremony attended by Lebed. Most recipients of the awards were veterans of the 1992 operation against Moldova.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> "Dniester hostilities not likely to resume," *Russian Press Digest*, 28 May 1993, p. 12.

<sup>123</sup> Bruce D. Porter and Carol R. Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire: Russia and the 'Near Abroad'" *Washington Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 72.

<sup>124</sup> Manilov address to audience at John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 9 March 1993; *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 14 September 1993; Basapress, reporting from Tiraspol, 2 October 1993, cited in *RFE/RL Research Report*, 6 October 1993.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

Contrary to what these reports might suggest, Lebed was not waiting for guidance from Yeltsin's government. In effect, during 1993 and 1994, Lebed privatized the 14th Army. He became tired of the constant uncertainty of dealing with Moscow. Lebed began to decide what his army did and made himself responsible for its welfare.<sup>126</sup> Throughout the Russian armed forces during this time, the main task of commanding officers became not to train for future wars or necessarily to obey orders from above, but to feed and pay their men.

#### **F. LEBED ELECTED TO TRANS-DNIESTER LEGISLATURE**

Lebed had become extremely popular locally, and became the kingpin of political life in the Trans-Dniester Republic. Thanks to a locally-promulgated "law" enabling a Russian citizen resident in Moldova to be a candidate for office, Lebed even ran for its parliament in September 1993. He won 88 percent of the vote on a platform openly advocating that Trans-Dniester be removed from Moldova and transferred to Russian control.<sup>127</sup>

The region's Russian-dominated population regarded Lebed as their protector. Moldova's foreign ministry immediately filed a complaint with the Russian government<sup>128</sup> The deputy speaker of the Moldovan parliament, Victor Puscasu, said, "This is an abnormal phenomenon which has no precedent in world practice...We view the 14th Army as a foreign army."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>"The Threat That Was," *Economist* (London), 28 August 1993, p. 17.

<sup>127</sup>Bruce D. Porter and Carol R. Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire: Russia and the 'Near Abroad'" *Washington Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 72.

<sup>128</sup>"Moldova protests election of Russian general in Dnestr," *Agence France Presse*, 15 September 1993.

<sup>129</sup>Ralph Boulton, "Russian General Elected In Rebel Moldova Region," *The Reuters Library Report*, 13 September 1993.

Lebed ran for the parliament position because he said he wanted to take an active part in Dniester's political life.<sup>130</sup> He won an overwhelming victory because of the popularity he gained in forming the peace deal between the Dniester forces and the Moldovan government.

During the rebel actions at Moscow's "White House" parliament building in October of 1993, Lebed was the only senior officer to publicly express doubt in Yeltsin's ability to override the crisis as he did.<sup>131</sup> Lebed only suggested, however, that Russia's regional leaders should take power in their own hands.

Lebed continued to show signs of political independence, confident in his own power. When President Yeltsin issued his decree of 21 September 1993, the dissolved Supreme Soviet invited Lebed to be its new Defense Minister. Lebed, however, refused.<sup>132</sup> He said that he considered the idea of armed resistance to the president and parallel power structures to be crazy.<sup>133</sup> He also did not accept the invitation of some representatives of Yeltsin's team to come to Moscow.

Lebed firmly refused to take sides with either the Yeltsin government or the anti-Yeltsin forces. He probably believed he could pick up the pieces as a third party if the crisis developed further, which suggests his ambition was stronger than his devotion to ideals.

On 13 October 1993, Lebed charged explicitly that Trans-Dniester officials sent men and weapons to the Russian parliament during the anti-Yeltsin rebellion.<sup>134</sup> Lebed

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<sup>130</sup>"Moldova protests election of Russian general in Dnestr," *Agence France Presse*, 15 September 1993.

<sup>131</sup>Leyla Boulton, "Crisis in Russia: Yeltsin pulls army into political ring," *Financial Times* (London), 5 October 1993, p. 4.

<sup>132</sup> "Head of Russian troops in Dnestr region said to reject overtures by both sides," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 5 October 1993.

<sup>133</sup> "General Lebed says Dnestr region leaders helped the White House," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 15 October 1993.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*

produced documents which confirmed that 50 sub-machine-guns had been sent to Moscow at the initiative of two Trans-Dniester generals. Lebed said the registration numbers of the sub-machine-guns were discovered in Moscow. He also said that Dniester region generals had given sniper's rifles and pistols to some former Russian deputies and that an adviser to the Dniester region state security minister had been detained in Moscow. According to Lebed, the Dniester region's official authorities were denying the fact that citizens from there had taken part in the defense of the "White House." Lebed said that if the defense and security ministers of the Dniester republic were not punished for having dispatched fighters to Moscow, it would be a serious blow to the republic's prestige.<sup>135</sup>

Lebed denounced Alexander Rutskoi, another Afghan war hero and nationalist, who led the Parliament's armed insurrection against Yeltsin. Similar to his own criticism, Lebed called the former vice-president a "half-Napoleon, half-Caesar." "He never has any doubts about anything, he is always right, what a happy man. I always have doubts but he doesn't have any." He said Rutskoi, who later ran for the Duma and the presidency at the head of his own "Derzhava"(Great Power) movement, was a "political corpse" after he promised to bring back the Stalinist GULAG system of slave labor camps<sup>136</sup>

Lebed disapproved of Rutskoi's role in the events that led to the shelling of the house of Parliament.<sup>137</sup> In his opinion, Rutskoi should have stood his ground to the end instead of seeking political asylum at foreign embassies and finally surrendering to the authorities. Lebed objected to Rutskoi's actions not because they were wrong for democracy, but because he acquiesced so easily. In Lebed's view, Rutskoi's behavior forever deprived him of the moral authority to be a credible political leader.

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>John Morrison, "Many Russians See Tough General as Next Head of State," *Reuters, Limited*, 10 October 1995.

<sup>137</sup>Ivan Boltovsky, "Alexander Lebed: 'Not Many Can Afford The Luxury Of Conscience Today, And Many Have Learned To Do Without It'" *Pravda*, 29 September 1995, pp. 8-9, in *Russian Press Digest*, 29 September 1995.

## G. LEBED RESIGNS FROM TRANS-DNIESTER LEGISLATURE

Relations between Lebed and the Dniester Republic leadership began to deteriorate. Lebed resigned as a lawmaker of the Dniester region on 14 October 1993, only one month after gaining office. He told the local parliament that a "wall of mistrust" had emerged between him and the legislature.<sup>138</sup> The conflict began after two Dniester security and interior ministers categorically rejected Lebed's accusations that they had sent arms and militants to defend the Russian parliament building in Moscow. "Time will judge us," Lebed said and left the session of the parliament.<sup>139</sup> Lebed continued to support Dniester demands for autonomy, but considered the republic's leadership had completely discredited itself.<sup>140</sup>

Lebed learned of the massive corruption and embezzlement for which the Trans-Dniester leadership was famous. He stated loudly to the parliament that he would "not travel along with thieves," and called upon the state to "make everybody feel its gentle embrace."<sup>141</sup> The army and Russian society at large took notice. Many interpreted this statement as aimed at the Yeltsin administration and Grachev's Defense Ministry, both widely regarded as corrupt.

Moldovan foreign minister Nicholaeciu at the UN General Assembly that same month described the 14th Army in Moldova as the main source of instability in the Trans-

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<sup>138</sup> "Gen. Lebed resigns as Dnestr deputy after ministers reject his accusations," Moscow ITAR-TASS news agency (World Service), 14 October 93 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 16 October 1993.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> "Russian General Draws Back From Hard-liners," *Reuters Library Report*, 15 October 1993.

<sup>141</sup> Morozov and Snegirev, "Lebedinyi ryk sotriasayet kremlevskie steny," p. 7.



Dniester region and demanded its immediate withdrawal.<sup>142</sup> After this speech, Lebed immediately departed for Moscow for participation in a meeting at the Russian Defense Ministry. They summoned Lebed for consultations concerning the situation in the Dniester area, which worsened after the October events in Moscow.<sup>143</sup> Lebed stressed that the 14th Army would stay in the region as long as it is necessary.

During 1993 and 1994, the Russian army gained the image of being capable of both crushing a parliament and of questioning commands. Lebed became a symbol of the army's uncertain role, and he was straightforward in his criticism of drawing the army into the conflict. He said,

I believe that a grandiose crime has been committed. You could do anything, but not drag the army into this affair. Can you imagine the situation of the soldier who comes home today to Tula or Ryazan, and old women spit in his face? It all happened before, in 1917, when the nation split into White and Red. History teaches us nothing.<sup>144</sup>

Lebed accurately used the lessons of history to boost his impending political career. The lesson is that a huge army that suddenly loses its mission and political guidance, distrusted by its people and denied support, will inevitably be drawn into politics.<sup>145</sup> The Russian newspaper *Komersant Daily* correctly observed, "Russia's long history shows clearly that the ones who come out on top in political disputes are the ones

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<sup>142</sup>Valeri Demidetsky, "Commander of 14th Russian Army Departs For Moscow," ITAR-TASS, 21 October 1993.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Here Lebed also hints at bitter regret for the end of the Russian Empire. Serge Schmemmann, "Russia's Military: A Shriveled and Volatile Legacy," *New York Times*, 28 November 1993, p. A1.

<sup>145</sup>A 1994 poll of officers in Moscow saw 76 per cent favoring Lebed for the position of Defense Minister. Mark Galeotti, "General Lebed - The Voice of Russia's Soldiers," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 1, (1 January 1995): 32.

who have the army on their sides."<sup>146</sup> Restoring the status of the Russian army was a key characteristic of Lebed's political platform in his campaign for parliament and for president.

## **H. LEBED RESIGNS FROM THE ARMY**

"Lebed is afraid of nobody and nothing. He didn't look to Moscow for solutions. He only acted as he thought best."

-Wife of a retired 14th Army major, *Moscow Times*, 17 June 1995

After Lebed left the Trans-Dniester parliament, he could no longer associate himself with the republic's leadership. He decided they were "bandits" and he was the last "great man."<sup>147</sup> As Lebed's political base in Moldova began to deteriorate, he decided to cross the small republic and enter Russian politics directly. Fearful of their subordinates rising popularity, Grachev and Yeltsin now tried to undermine the ambitious general's future.

In 1994, Grachev began pushing for reduction of the Russian forces in the Trans-Dniester region. He called for bringing the 14th Army and its arsenal back to Russia proper and demanded both the removal of the Army commander and a dramatic reduction in the 14th Army's manpower.<sup>148</sup> When Grachev first ordered the downsizing of the officer corps of the Russian 14th Army in Moldova in the summer of 1994, Lebed stated the shrinkage would allow criminals or opposing factions in the Dniester republic to seize the army's large weapons stores.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>*Komersant Daily* quote from Candice Hughes, "Blunt General Waits in Wings of Chechen Crisis," *Associated Press*, 11 January 1995.

<sup>147</sup>Michael Specter, "The Wars of Aleksandr Ivanovich Lebed," *New York Times*, 13 October 1996, sec. 6, p. 44.

<sup>148</sup>Ariel Cohen, "General Alexander Lebed: Russia's Rising Political Star," *Heritage Foundation Reports*, 26 September 1995, p. 1.

<sup>149</sup> "Yeltsin accepts resignation of general," *United Press International*, 14 June 1995.

Grachev ordered Lebed to report to Moscow in July 1994, where Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin offered him the post of Defense Minister of Tajikistan, a Central Asian state in the throes of civil war. Lebed declined because he did not want to involve himself in another civil war. Yeltsin finally intervened<sup>150</sup> and Grachev reversed his decision,<sup>151</sup> but Lebed had to fight repeated attempts by Grachev to remove him from command of the 14th Army during the following months. Lebed refused to withdraw the 14th Army and continued to sit on the largest arsenal of weapons in southeastern Europe until his resignation in May 1995.

Although Yeltsin intervened to keep Lebed in place when Grachev tried to remove him, Lebed became increasingly critical of Yeltsin's administration. He harshly attacked Yeltsin openly in the media, and offered his own vision of Russia in the present world.<sup>152</sup> He addressed its national interests, as well as a program of radical and pragmatic reforms for the Army and the rest of the country.

Lebed claimed there were three reasons why the 14th Army should stay in Moldova: (1) if the Army was moved, the ethnic conflict would start again; (2) both the Trans-Dniester Russians and Moldovans wanted the Russian Army to stay; and (3) moving the army with its weaponry would be dangerous. In the event of withdrawal, he warned, the arms would be seized by the Trans-Dniestran Russians, who would sell them or use them to fight Moldovans.<sup>153</sup>

It was often argued that Lebed did not enunciate the fourth, and most important, reason: According to a leading Russian military commentator, for Russia to keep the huge

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<sup>150</sup>Viktor Litovkin, "President Rossii zashchishchayet generala Lebedya," *Izvestiya* (Moscow), 16 August 1994, p. 1.

<sup>151</sup>Alexander Minkin, "Alexander Lebed pobyval v Moskve s kratkosrochnym visitom," *Segodnya*, 25 August 1994, p. 1.

<sup>152</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 429.

<sup>153</sup>Ariel Cohen, "General Alexander Lebed: Russia's Rising Political Star," *Heritage Foundation Reports*, 26 September 1995, p. 1.

arsenal in Moldova made sense only if the former Soviet Union was to be put back together again. To do this would require a large army close to the Balkans and in Ukraine's rear, hundreds of miles away from the Russian border.<sup>154</sup> Looking at the USSR's pre-1992 borders, it would make perfect sense for Lebed, a Russian "great power patriot," to keep the huge arsenal in Moldova indefinitely, until such time as a new Soviet Union or a larger Russia could be created.

Lebed's anti-government statements increased as pressure for the 14th army's downsizing grew. This prompted Grachev to tell Lebed to decide between the army or politics. Defense Ministry officials again called him to the capital and told him to accept drastic cuts in his army or resign. Lebed chose to resign, ending a 26 year career in the army.

In late May of 1995, Grachev passed Lebed's resignation on to Yeltsin, who continuously supported Grachev despite his unpopularity among the troops and his mistakes in Chechnya.<sup>155</sup> Yeltsin, as commander-in-chief of the Russian armed forces, hesitated over the decision for a full two weeks. Yeltsin claimed he put off a ruling until a special commission investigated the debate over the 14th Army.

Yeltsin most likely turned down the resignation because it would be difficult for Lebed to make any definite political moves while still a commander in the army.<sup>156</sup> Yeltsin finally accepted Lebed's resignation in June of 1995. Months of conflict between the two leaders finally came to an end.

When Lebed left Moldova, over 100 women calling themselves the Union to Defend Trans-Dniester lay on the airport runway in protest. They prevented his

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<sup>154</sup>Pavel Felgengauer, "Rossiyskaya armiya uydet iz Moldavii ne spesha," *Segodnya*, 12 August 1994, p. 2.

<sup>155</sup>"Yeltsin Accepts Resignation of General," *United Press International*, 14 June 1995.

<sup>156</sup>Fred Kaplan, "Yeltsin Won't Let a General Resign; Seen as Candidate; Polls Rate Lebed Higher Than President," *Boston Globe*, 7 June 1995 p. 2.

replacement, Major General Valery Yevnevich, from landing and temporarily frustrated his plan to take over from Lebed.<sup>157</sup>

In an interview with the *Moscow Times*, Lebed said that he was "kicked out like a drunken warrant officer," but he was past getting offended. "You can only get offended at decent people. With those despicable people all you can do is drive them out of power and the only legitimate way to do it is through elections." <sup>158</sup> Lebed apparently recognized the legitimacy of democracy in Russia, but at the same time pressed for a change in the leadership.

Lebed did not offer any advice to Yevnevich on how to administer the 14th Army: "My attitude to anyone who used Russian tanks and Russian soldiers in the Russian capital to shoot at the Russian parliament is extremely negative. And it's 10 times as negative to anyone who picked up a medal in the process."<sup>159</sup> Lebed was referring to Yeltsin's honoring Yevnevich for his role in the 1993 suppression of the parliament. Many officers in Lebed's 14th Army agreed.

The locals believed that Lebed's removal meant war for their troubled region and residents made a run on food stores, clearing them out of flour and salt. Lebed inspired blind devotion in many of his men. Some of the officers tendered their resignations at the same time as their commander, and were immediately discharged. A major who served with Lebed said he would not serve under anyone but Lebed, and would go wherever Lebed went and "do what he tells me to do."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup>Yevnevich, Lebed's successor, was criticized for his role in leading his Taman tank division in shelling the rebellious Russian parliament for Yeltsin in October 1993. He was seen as a Yeltsin ally, in contradiction to Lebed, who had opposed Yeltsin for years. Yevnevich, perhaps worst of all, was also seen as a loyal supporter of Grachev. See Alessandra Stanley, "Russia's 'Colin Powell'; This General Has Made Up His Mind," *International Herald Tribune*, 14 October 1995: p. 8.

<sup>158</sup>Leonid Bershidsky, "Protesters Blockade Lebed Replacement," *Moscow Times*, 17 June 1995.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

Lebed did not leave quietly. He berated Grachev and Yeltsin for the bloody drive to crush secessionist Chechnya. In a comment that received widespread popular approval, Lebed said he would only go to Chechnya if he could take the sons of the political elite in Moscow into battle with him.<sup>161</sup> By the time Lebed left Moldova--after several times refusing direct orders by his superiors to depart--he had become, like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a fire-breathing advocate of that fading ideal: glorious Russia.<sup>162</sup>

## I. THE AFTERMATH

The long feud between Grachev and Lebed continued into 1996. Shortly after Lebed's resignation, Grachev dismissed Lebed's right-hand man, Mikhail Bergman, then-garrison commandant in Trans-Dniester's capital of Tiraspol, and several other officers.<sup>163</sup> A Russian military court attached to the Russian military contingent in the Trans-Dniester region, however, ruled that they all should be reinstated, and then in March of 1996 accused Grachev of refusing to obey its decision. The court accused Grachev of "purposefully deviating from the implementation of the court's decision," and regarded Grachev's lack of action as purposeful evasion from implementing the ruling.<sup>164</sup>

With the end of the Soviet Union, a large part of the Russian army was stranded outside the boundaries of the Russian Federation. American officials estimated that at least 200,000 Russian troops were based outside Russia, compared with 1.25 million inside.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>David Hoffman, "Maverick General Upstages Yeltsin; Top Presidential Candidate Promises to Restore Order," *Washington Post*, 21 October 1995, p. A1.

<sup>162</sup>Michael Specter, "The Wars of Aleksandr Ivanovich Lebed," *New York Times*, 13 October 1996, sec. 6, p. 44.

<sup>163</sup>*AP Worldstream*, Associated Press, 4 March 1996.

<sup>164</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup>The actual numbers were uncertain. A Russian Defense Ministry spokesman said the number was "not for the press to have." From Steven Erlanger, "In Ex-Soviet Lands, Russian Army Can Be a Protector or an Occupier," *New York Times*, 30 November 1993, p. A1.

Most of them were in the Near Abroad. Without the communist party, the degree of control Moscow exercised over the troops became uncertain, and the uncertainty paved the way for generals like Lebed. Yeltsin demonstrated his lack of control during the October 1993 political crisis in Moscow, when he needed the support of the generals and was reluctant to contradict them.

An analyst with the military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star) said Lebed could not help getting caught up in the tumultuous world of politics in Moldova and Russia. The army plays such a vital role in many former Soviet republics that it is inevitable that the military will mix with politics.<sup>166</sup> Lebed's role in Moldova was actually to make sure people were not killed there during a purely political, ethnic conflict. He succeeded in stopping the bloodshed, but the end result was just another difficult position. Lebed was ordered by the Yeltsin administration not to get involved in politics, but for Lebed getting involved in politics was inevitable.

A paradoxical development evolved in Russia during Lebed's command of the 14th Army in Moldova. While the military power of the Russian Army declined, and the demoralization of its officers and generals continued, the political role of the Army was quite high.<sup>167</sup> The Army became the most powerful factor in internal political struggles. A year later, Yeltsin's "power structures" were eventually able to thwart the potential hostility of the Army toward his regime, but not without forming a strategic alliance with the man who would catapult him into a second term.

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<sup>166</sup>Oleg Odnokolenko quoted by Larry Ryckman, "Report: Russia's Most Outspoken General To Be Sacked," *AP Worldstream*, 4 August 1994.

<sup>167</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no.3, (Autumn 1995): 417-37.

#### IV. AFTER THE ARMY: LEBED CONQUERS MOSCOW

##### A. THE PARLIAMENTARY CAMPAIGN: VICTORY WITHOUT SUCCESS

"I was not just brought into politics. I was driven in."-*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 17 May 1995

Lebed's popularity in Moldova grew as his stance against Yeltsin intensified, and his independent nature became clear. After he resigned, Lebed strongly opposed the Russian leadership's prosecution of its war in Chechnya and won broad popularity among the military with his vocal support of the dream of a powerful, well-funded army that is respected at home and abroad. Stern-looking with a deep bass voice, Lebed, however, appeared less formidable in a suit than he did in a uniform.<sup>168</sup> His campaign continued to gather support, perhaps because he had the reputation of a man who can keep his promise to restore order to crime-plagued Russia because he kept strict order in the 14th army. Lebed wanted Russians to believe that he brought courage and purposefulness to the political arena.

Lebed tried to define himself as a Russian patriot who appealed to both communists and nationalists. In media interviews published in 1993-1995, he attacked Russia's current leadership, charging that "Yeltsin is nothing but the first [Communist Party] secretary of Sverdlovsk, infamous for the destruction of the building where the last Russian czar and his family were incarcerated before their execution."<sup>169</sup> He also publicly said he was reading the memoirs of White Russian generals Anton Denikin and Peter Krasnov from the Russian Civil War era (1918-1921), which suggested support for the nationalist right wing. In the same interview, however, Lebed showed sympathy for communism. He declared himself an atheist and defended keeping a large bust of Lenin in

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<sup>168</sup> "Ex-general wants to lead Russia; Lebed joins candidates for presidency, suggests uniting with Communists," *Baltimore Sun*, (from wire reports), 29 December 1995, p. 6A.

<sup>169</sup> Morozov and Snegirev, "Lebedinyi ryk sotriasayet kremlevskie steny," p. 7.



his headquarters, complaining, "they threw the old fetishes to the junkyard, but did not give us new ones, therefore Lenin stays."<sup>170</sup>

The general belief is that Lebed entered politics at the same time he was discharged from the Army, but while he was still an army commander, democrats from Russia's Democratic Choice, Communist patriots, and politicians who simply wanted to play the patriotism card all tried to attract him to their side. When he left the army, Lebed was at the top of the political approval rating charts. According to surveys by the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion, in June 1995 he moved into first place among "the most acceptable candidates for the post of President of Russia."<sup>171</sup> At that time, his rating was only 7.9%, but Yeltsin himself held the tenth place position, with a ranking of 2%.<sup>172</sup> Lebed stayed in first place until autumn.

As the Duma election campaign intensified, Lebed was drawn into the company of the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO), a political coalition founded in 1993 to support millions of ethnic Russians who were left behind in other republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lebed soon joined the organization, and it was from the KRO that Lebed gained his initial political support. In the 1995 parliamentary elections, the KRO failed to cross the 5 percent threshold required to get any of the 225 State Duma seats allotted to party lists, and that failure was considered a major upset for the party's high-profile leaders.<sup>173</sup> Lebed's political partners, however, discovered that his loyalty was not an absolute. Just as the KRO was using Lebed, Lebed was using the KRO, and Lebed found it was time to move on. Three months before the presidential election, he joined a coalition of political centrists called Third Force.

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<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

<sup>171</sup>Georgy Bovt, "Personnel Reshuffle in the Kremlin," *Kommersant-Daily*, 19 June 1996, p. 3, in "Yeltsin Gives Lebed Top Security Post," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 17 July 1996, p. 3.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

<sup>173</sup>Leonid Bershidsky, "Lebed Set to Split From Skokov and Party," *Moscow Times*, 2 February 1996.

## 1. Congress of Russian Communities

The KRO was a political party run by moderate nationalists and economic liberals. It was an umbrella organization for several influential groups of Russian businessmen.<sup>174</sup> Lebed's economic program was drafted by Russian free-market economists close to these groups and centered around Vitaly Naishul. Naishul promoted the concepts of "self-reliance" and "self-governance," which meant delegating power from the central to the local governments and rejecting foreign aid.<sup>175</sup>

The leaders of the KRO were very different people. Besides Lebed, the other chief figures in the party were experienced Moscow politician Yuri Skokov and the Duma member Sergey Glazyev. Skokov was a skilled operative who was Yeltsin's National Security Council chief until 1993, and who had close ties with Russia's military-industrial complex. Glazyev was chairman of the State Duma Committee on Industrial Policy and the youngest of the major Russian economists.<sup>176</sup>

The first person to bring Lebed from Moldova into Moscow politics was a fighter for the rights of "Russians in the near abroad" -- Konstantin Zatulin, Chairman of the Fifth Duma's Committee on CIS Affairs. Right before Lebed was removed from the post of army commander, Zatulin organized Duma hearings on the fate of the 14th Army. The hearings had wide political repercussions and added to the image Lebed and his followers wished to create. At the time, Lebed was already a member of the KRO's council. Lebed stated at the Duma hearings that he would not let the 14th Army's weapons be stolen. He said if he had to "twist off someone's head, I'll twist it off with this very hand," and he

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<sup>174</sup>These groups included the Federation of Russian Producers, the League of Russian Entrepreneurs, and the Movement of Owners (also known as the Stolypin Society, named after the reformist interior minister of Czar Nicholas II who was assassinated in 1911.) See Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>175</sup>Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>176</sup>David Hoffman, "Maverick General Upstages Yeltsin; Top Presidential Candidate Promises to Restore Order," *Washington Post*, 21 October 1995, p. A1.

brandished his weighty fist. From that time on, the prevailing image of the general was that of the fist.

Skokov immediately made two mistakes when he teamed up with Lebed. Believing he would be the primary candidate, Skokov made the potentially charismatic Lebed the KRO's second candidate for the Duma election, thereby giving rise to a profound internal conflict in the KRO. As a man of military-style loyalty, Lebed observed the rules of the game until the elections, but the KRO itself did not reinforce his stance. Skokov's second mistake was his attempt to capitalize on nostalgia for a "strong hand." But the KRO's advertisements were too military in appeal, and the future justice that they advertised evoked unpleasant associations with the unforgettable "troikas," or extra-judicial three-man tribunals, used to condemn Stalin's victims.<sup>177</sup>

The KRO was also damaged by suspicions of Great Russian chauvinism, caused by the KRO's idea that "Russian communities" must be formed everywhere, even in the workplace. *Obshchinnost*, or "communality," as understood by the KRO, struck voters in December 1995 as a far more abstract idea than concrete social and economic problems. Lebed never voiced any objection to this idea before the election.<sup>178</sup>

The striking feature of the KRO's program, and maybe a cause for the party's failure in the parliamentary elections, was that there was no distinct ideological framework. It was not a radical nationalistic program like Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, and it was not a liberal reform party like Grigory Yavlinsky's Yobloko bloc. It certainly did not have the strong, well-known ideology of the communist party. The KRO was not orientated towards some specific social class or group of the population (for example, peasants, entrepreneurs or workers), not oriented towards a specific

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<sup>177</sup>Georgy Bovt, "Personnel Reshuffle in the Kremlin," *Kommersant-Daily*, 19 June 1996, p. 3, in "Yeltsin Gives Lebed Top Security Post," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 17 July 1996, p. 3.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid.

ideology (liberalism, Marxism, social democracy, nationalism, etc.), but simply towards what Lebed called "problems and situations."<sup>179</sup>

Before the parliamentary elections, political analysts warned Lebed that his allies only wanted to use his image to get seats in the Duma. His one-time ally Skokov, after failing to win a Duma seat, changed the tactics of supporting Lebed to trying to strip him of all political prospects. Skokov put his personal ambitions above the will of the party, which had nominated Lebed as a candidate for presidency.<sup>180</sup> Jealous of his ally's rising popularity, Skokov instructed KRO regional leaders against canvassing signatures to support Lebed or financing his election campaign.<sup>181</sup> During Lebed's parliamentary and presidential campaigns, Skokov remained a member of the KRO but became politically ineffective.

## **2. The Campaign For Parliament**

Russian politics became more a clash of personalities than a choice of ideology, and in 1995 Lebed stood out.<sup>182</sup> With his charismatic personality, he promised to return Russia to greatness. A nationwide survey in July by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems showed that Lebed had the highest positive ratings among all leading Russian politicians and was the top choice for president if the election were then.<sup>183</sup> But

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<sup>179</sup> "Press Conference With General Alexander Lebed, A Leader of the Congress of Russian Communities Electoral Bloc," *Federal News Service*, 11 January 1996.

<sup>180</sup> Tamara Zamyatina, "New Coalition to Back Lebed for President," ITAR-TASS, 29 February 1996.

<sup>181</sup> Tamara Zamyatina, "New Coalition to Back Lebed for President," ITAR-TASS, 29 February 1996. Another reason why Skokov abandoned Lebed is that he did not want to create conflict with Yeltsin by supporting his rival in the presidential elections. And Skokov himself hoped that a victory in the parliamentary elections would be the first step on his way to presidency. See Lev Isakov, "A General Falls Victim To Mesalliance," *Russian Press Digest*, 8 February 1996, p. 8.

<sup>182</sup> David Hoffman, "Maverick General Upstages Yeltsin; Top Presidential Candidate Promises to Restore Order," *Washington Post*, 21 October 1995, p. A1.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

even so, Lebed commanded only 14 percent, a sign of the deep fragmentation of the electorate.

By December of 1995, Lebed was the most widely discussed figure in Russian politics. He ran for a seat in the Duma, the lower house of the Russian Parliament. Lebed and the KRO conducted one of the most expensive election campaigns, a fact that was very visible to most Russian voters. They had the most bumper stickers, posters and pamphlets of all, the widest variety of television ads and clips, and the most paid radio and television air time.<sup>184</sup> Almost everyone expected his party to do well in the parliamentary elections. Experts predicted that he would be a strong candidate in the presidential elections.<sup>185</sup>

Television commercials showed Lebed and the KRO's other two leaders striding down a broad tree-lined path. Their program was vague on economic policy, but included promises of a crackdown on corruption and crime and a strong army.<sup>186</sup>

Lebed won a seat in the Tula constituency, a city of arms factories south of Moscow, where he once commanded an airborne division. He was the only man from his party to be elected to the State Duma. Although he won a seat in Parliament without any problem in a head-to-head race, his party did not even gather the five percent necessary to enter as a bloc.<sup>187</sup> Pre-election polls predicted the KRO to finish just behind the Communists, but the party finished far behind in actual balloting with just 4.3 percent of

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<sup>184</sup>Natalya Arkhangelskaya, "Party Staffs and the Elections: On Party Staffs, Ideological Dilettantes Are A Terrible Force," *Kommersant-Daily*, 23 December 1995, p. 5 in "How Did Pollsters Affect the Election? Arkhangelskaya Rates Campaign Staffs' Work," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 31 January 1996, p. 11.

<sup>185</sup>Phil Reeves, "Old bruiser set to give Yeltsin a bloody nose; As the fledgling Third Force' group gathers strength, alarm bells ring in the Kremlin," *Independent*, 29 March 1996, p. 16.

<sup>186</sup>Tatyana Kukunova, "Lebed Cries Foul as Russian Election Count Goes On," *Reuters, Limited*, 20 December 1995.

<sup>187</sup>Michael Specter, "Army Hero Enters Russian Race, Posing a Big Threat to Reformers," *New York Times*, 29 December 1995, p. A1.

the vote.<sup>188</sup> Analysts believed Lebed would ride into the Duma on the crest of a patriotic tidal wave, but instead he led the KRO to a major humiliation.

It became clear the party was damaged by the personality feud between Lebed and its co-leader, Yuri Skokov. Overnight, the general lost his impeccable status, and it looked as if Russians would no longer be treated to endless television interviews in which they marveled as much at his astonishingly deep voice as his politics.<sup>189</sup>

Observers have said Lebed would have been better-off if he could have hung on longer in Moldova.<sup>190</sup> In Moldova, part of his charm was as a leader on the periphery blasting the central government. Later, during the 1996 presidential campaign, much of his appeal might have vanished because of the Moscow political scene. Moscow was a very different environment for Lebed, and he was no longer an outsider. He said, "Earlier I was a soldier and everything was clear to me, but now I live in a different world."<sup>191</sup>

## **B. THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN: SUCCESS WITHOUT VICTORY**

### **1. The Third Force Emerges**

Lebed insisted a difficult choice between communists and the Yeltsin government was being imposed on the Russian people. At the same time, there was a "sensible force in the political spectrum, supported by at least 60 per cent of the Russian electorate." Lebed began negotiations with Duma deputies Svyatoslav Fedorov and Stanislav

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<sup>188</sup>Frank Viviano, "Russian Communist Gain - But the Center Holds," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 December 1995, p. A1.

<sup>189</sup>Phil Reeves, "Old bruiser set to give Yeltsin a bloody nose; As the fledgling Third Force' group gathers strength, alarm bells ring in the Kremlin," *Independent*, 29 March 1996, p. 16.

<sup>190</sup>"Yeltsin accepts resignation of general," *United Press International*, 14 June 1995.

<sup>191</sup>"Gen Aleksandr Lebed Confident of Winning Presidential Election," Russian Television Network, Moscow, 23 February 1996 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 26 February 1996.

Govorukhin and the Yabloko party leader, Grigoriy Yavlinskiy. He believed that united they could become such a force.

In March of 1996, a new coalition of Russian centrists and hard-liners emerged, ambitiously calling itself Third Force. Initially, it was announced that it would back Lebed for the presidency.<sup>192</sup> The coalition was founded by well-known eye-surgeon Svyatoslav Fedorov, film director Stanislav Govorukhin, ex-Yeltsin minister Sergey Glazyev and conservative Sergey Baburin, leader of Russia's All-People's Union (ROS). Konstantin Zatulin, at the time a leader of the KRO, was an architect of the coalition. Zatulin explained, "We want to unite the voters who do not wish to choose between the two major rivals for presidency - communist Gennadiy Zyuganov and Boris Yeltsin,"<sup>193</sup> Officially, Lebed remained head of the KRO Moscow regional branch, but counted primarily on the Third Force coalition to gain political support.<sup>194</sup>

Lebed, Yavlinsky and Fedorov became the outspoken candidates of the Third Force, but their political differences proved difficult to resolve. Fedorov was eager for a coalition on any terms, but both Lebed and Yavlinsky were unwilling to relinquish leadership to the other. The assumed alliance between Yavlinsky and Lebed was peculiar in the large field of Russian political parties. Yavlinsky was an American-educated economist who wanted to keep Russia on the path of democratic reform, while Lebed was seen as a recently retired army general who promised to restore order in Russia and coerce the rest of the government to his desire. For Yavlinsky, political ambition was more important than preservation of reform. His views on most issues were much closer to those of Yeltsin than to those of Lebed.

Even ex-USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev called for a general democratic alliance to rule out choosing between "two evils" -- Yeltsin and Zyuganov, but Lebed

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<sup>192</sup>Tamara Zamyatina, "New Russian left-of center coalition to back former commander Lebed for president," ITAR-TASS news agency World Service (Moscow), 29 February 1996 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 4 March 1996.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid.

openly rejected his support.<sup>195</sup> Lebed viewed Gorbachev as a leader who failed his people and gave up an empire. Lebed's response to Gorbachev's attempts to join Third Force was, "Mikhail Sergeyevich is constantly trying to turn himself into my daddy - and I am constantly trying to stay an orphan. He has gone out on deck, but there's no deck there. So I don't need that sort of political experience."<sup>196</sup>

Lebed maintained a strong, independent political stance. In an interview by Global Viewpoint months before he joined Third Force he asserted that he had "mainly centrist beliefs:"

What is being presented to us as democracy is actually ersatz, an attempt to make someone else's experience our own. Like Gorbachev, who inappropriately tried to grow cactus at his summer dacha, we have grown an ugly plant not suited to Russia. Today, the so-called democrats are, in their present shape, not acceptable, and it is not possible for the Communists to rule. So we must seek a place in between. No matter how long you strive to seek the horizon, you never reach it. But we need to live today with what we have.<sup>197</sup>

Lebed ruled out his participation in a shadow cabinet of the "left-wing and popular-patriotic coalition" headed by Zyuganov: "There will never be a place for me in the government of either President Yeltsin or Communist leader Zyuganov."<sup>198</sup> Lebed said he had developed an "allergy to the members of the Soviet Communist Party Central

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<sup>195</sup>Gorbachev said that he was ready to lead the Third Force and that he would discuss the principles of cooperation and role-sharing in the Third Force team with the leaders of the democratic spectrum before the second round. Gorbachev ran for Russian President as the "single candidate of all democratic and reformist forces." See: "Gorbachev warns Yavlinskiy trio about Yeltsin 'snare'," *Russian Television Network*, Moscow, 12 May 1996 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* 13 May 1996, and Tatiana Malkina, "Club Of Lonely Hearts," *Segodnya*, p. 2, from *Russian Press Digest*, 2 March 1996.

<sup>196</sup>"Lebed won't withdraw from election until threat of civil war is averted," *Russian Television Network*, Moscow, 6 May 1996, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 13 May 1996.

<sup>197</sup>"He's No Democrat," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1995, p. 9.

<sup>198</sup>"Gen. Lebed says he will not join left-wing shadow cabinet," *Interfax* (Moscow) in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 22 February 1996.



Committee who first broke up the country and now are trying to create a new state and form a government on its ruins."<sup>199</sup> Often rejecting the idea of serving in another administration, Lebed painted himself as an independent military leader led only by a sense of duty to the Russian people.

The Third Force never really materialized. Their alliance, after all, was not about any common political philosophy. It was about a common desire to gain ground in an election that appeared to be turning into a two-man race between Yeltsin and Zyuganov.

## **2. The Campaign For President**

"It's not the generals who are running for election that you have to worry about, it's the ones who aren't." - Lebed quoted in the *Ottawa Citizen*, July 6, 1996

If success in the 1996 Russian presidential campaign depended on the clarity and brevity of a candidate's message, than Lebed was the winner. The Russian press, friend and foe alike, agreed that he spoke directly to Russia's wounded pride. He supported the cause of the Russian "colonials" living outside Russia in the newly independent states; he considered the collapse of the USSR a disaster and wanted to renew the old links between Moscow and its neighbors; he warned the expansion of NATO could lead to World War III; he wanted the government to regulate the economy more closely; and, above all, he declared war on crime and corruption.<sup>200</sup>

Initially, the nationalist field in Russian politics was crowded. The *Financial Times* stressed that the principal candidates had much in common, namely a variety of nationalism between Cold-War resentment and the pro- western euphoria that marked Russia's policies following the break-up of the Soviet Union.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Ibid.

<sup>200</sup>S. Frederick Starr, "A Russian Politician to Reckon With," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 December 1995, p. 19.

<sup>201</sup>M. Podkopayeva, "Russia And Pinochet," *Zavtra*, p. 2, in *Russian Press Digest*, 3 July 1996.

The Canadian *Globe And Mail* summed up by insisting that "nationalism is the main theme of the Russian election."<sup>202</sup> In its opinion, all five leading candidates were nationalists in one way or another. According to its classification, Yeltsin was a populist nationalist, Zyuganov was a Communist nationalist, Yavlinsky was a liberal nationalist, Zhirinovskiy was a xenophobic nationalist, and Lebed was an ethnic nationalist. For Lebed, the label of "ethnic nationalist", however, was probably not correct, since he actually spoke of uniting all the native Russian "nations" and religions.<sup>203</sup> All the nationalist candidates attempted to become the "most patriotic" leader.

Historically, Russian nationalism was always subordinate to a larger imperial idea, since Russians have never lived in a state that was anything but an empire. The Soviet Empire, just like the czars' empire, provided international prestige for the regime and may even have served as a source of its legitimacy.<sup>204</sup> In this sense, Lebed wanted to create a strong sense of Russian identity, yet he did not want to discriminate against those with other origins. According to Peter J. Stavrakis, in a statement to a congressional committee on human rights, Lebed "remained virtually the only candidate in the nationalist camp who did not base his campaign explicitly on ethnic themes."<sup>205</sup>

Lebed did not begin his presidential campaign with fervor, which made his strong finish that much more surprising. At first, many of his audiences could not understand

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<sup>202</sup>*Globe And Mail* quoted by M. Podkopayeva, "Russia And Pinochet," *Zavtra*, p. 2, in *Russian Press Digest*, 3 July 1996.

<sup>203</sup>There was an important element of "union" and "empire" in Lebed's thinking. In his autobiography, Lebed lists the native religious traditions as "Russian Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and many sects [a term usually applied to Protestants]." See Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "The Struggle for the Kremlin," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 13, (8 August 1996): 33.

<sup>204</sup>Rebecca V. Strode and Colin S. Gray, "The Imperial Dimension of Soviet Military Power," *Problems of Communism* (Nov-Dec 1981): 9. See also Sergei Maksudov and William Taubman, "Russian-Soviet Nationality Policy and Foreign Policy: A Historical Overview of the Linkage Between Them," *The Rise of Nations* p18.

<sup>205</sup>Peter J. Stavrakis, testimony before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, 27 February 1996.

why he was called "the most charismatic politician in Russia."<sup>206</sup> He started wearing his lieutenant-general's uniform again hoping to impress his audiences. Lebed would arrive late at election rallies, stand stiffly "at ease" and deliver - without notes and without much coherence - long rambling denunciations on a number of general topics. His elderly, working-class and embittered audiences still were not impressed.<sup>207</sup>

Then changes began to occur. Lebed did not become any more educated or better prepared for the campaign, but instead was joined by a group of young talented electoral technocrats. Lebed learned the art of the sometimes witty, but usually sinister, sound-bite, and acquired policies written for him by a pro-market, but pro-autocracy economist.<sup>208</sup> They gave him a new hairstyle to appear less aggressive, and stylish Western suits and ties.<sup>209</sup> They even taught him how to effect something approaching a smile.<sup>210</sup> His political advertisements also became more competently put together.

During the presidential campaign Lebed released a document entitled, "Ideology and Common Sense" which outlined his electoral program. His slogan was "Truth and order" promising to "put things in order both in the economy and in the country in general." Lebed stressed at the same time that his chief target was to "create order out of the chaos existing in Russia today."<sup>211</sup>

Interestingly, Lebed claimed that he would never agree to be a defense minister under President Yeltsin. He described the Yeltsin regime as a democracy which was

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<sup>206</sup> Ann Leslie, "Whatever Russia's Election Result, Lebed is the Man to Watch," *Daily Mail*, 4 July 1996, p. 24.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ron Popeski, "'Kingmaker' Lebed Meets Yeltsin. Launches Bid for Job," *Reuter European Community Report*, 17 June 1996.

<sup>210</sup> *Moscow Times*, 9 July 1996.

<sup>211</sup> "Presidential Candidates Background -- Lebed," TASS, 14 June 1996.

"totalitarian in essence"<sup>212</sup> He also told Moscow television that he would have "climbed the notorious tank back in 1991" if he had wanted to be defense minister, referring to Yeltsin's standing on the tank during the attempted coup.<sup>213</sup>

Lebed's audiences grew as his message became more focused. He stressed that he was not going to withdraw his candidacy and informed President Yeltsin about his decision during their meeting early in May of 1996, saying, "I oppose any deals in principle."<sup>214</sup> His slogan of "Truth and Order" and promise to purge corruption and crime appealed to many Russians. He blasted the Communist past and the "even greater vileness and lies" of Yeltsin's administration.

On the one hand, Lebed continued to show the West that he was not the democrat that could someday replace Yeltsin. If elected, Lebed intended to review the Russian constitution adopted in 1993. In particular, although the State Duma already has few powers, he believed it would have been expedient to transform it from an elected body into a body appointed by the president.

On the other hand, Lebed showed some faith in Russia's fledgling market economy: "In theory, government officials should not meddle in the affairs of the market. There is the market in which everything is determined by the price, by supply and demand, by trade. Those who engage in trade do not meddle in affairs of state administration."<sup>215</sup>

The Lebed phenomenon was even confirmed in rock music. One of the hottest songs on the Russian rock scene during this period was "Kombat," an anthem to an army

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<sup>212</sup> "Gen Aleksandr Lebed Confident of Winning Presidential Election," Russian Television Network, Moscow, 23 February 1996 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 26 February 1996.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> "Third force" Close to Collapse - Presidential Candidate Lebed," ITAR-TASS news agency (World Service), Moscow, 13 May 1996 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* 13 May 1996.

<sup>215</sup> "Press Conference With Alexander Lebed," *Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast*, 13 May 1996.

commander who defends Moscow amid crashing planes and burning tanks. While the rock group Lyube did not name the hero, few people doubted that it was Lebed.<sup>216</sup> The commander was even identified as Lebed by the ultra-nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy at a Duma press conference.<sup>217</sup> Although the song was recorded months before Lebed's burst in popularity, the fact that everyone was talking about him as the mysterious commander proved how much he caught the popular imagination.

Russian democracy passed a monumental milestone in the 1996 election. For the first time in a thousand years, Russian citizens -- not royal families, politburos or Mafia-cartels -- decided who should rule their country. Alexander Shokhin, first deputy chairman of the lower house of parliament said the triumph of democracy was the fact that the elections even took place, and that they were held without fraud.<sup>218</sup> Although, the effect was dulled by Yeltsin's hesitating about declaring a dictatorship as he feared defeat. Despite calls by Russian bankers and some of Yeltsin's own advisers to postpone the vote, Russia's presidential election took place as scheduled.

The question still remained: Would the system sustain a change of power? In the first election Yeltsin received 35 per cent of the vote, Zyuganov 32 per cent and Lebed came a distant third with 14.7 per cent. Lebed's support was much higher than expected, and immediately his impact became known. Nowhere was Lebed's influence more apparent than with the military vote, where he polled 47 per cent. Yeltsin drew only 29 per cent with the armed forces, Zhirinovskiy 14 per cent, and Zyuganov as little as 8 per cent.<sup>219</sup> The startling popularity of Lebed was confirmed, and the world took notice.

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<sup>216</sup>Alan Philips, "The Army's Rasputin Casts His Spell Over Russian Hearts," *Daily Telegraph* 10 July 1996, p. 14.

<sup>217</sup>Owen Matthews, "Buzz-Cut Crowd Says Lebed's Just 'Cool'," *Moscow Times*, 6 July 1996.

<sup>218</sup>Lee Hockstader "Russian Democracy Gets Another Chance; But Potential for New Kremlin Conflicts Remains After Ailing Yeltsin's Victory," *Washington Post*, 4 July 1996, p. A01.

<sup>219</sup>"Ruthless moves head off communist revival," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2, 10 July 1996, p. 8.

Of all the candidates, Lebed conducted the most coherent campaign, and, except for Yeltsin's, the most effective. A summary of his campaign platform appeared in the mass-circulation newspaper *Argumenty i fakty* in May, 1996 and was referred to as "a model of issue presentation."<sup>220</sup> Even Lebed's longtime nemesis, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev agreed that Lebed's election program would be good for Russia.<sup>221</sup> It was concise, detailed, with general principles backed up by specific proposals. It placed heavy emphasis on restoring law and order, in particular strengthening the court system, protecting witnesses, and providing much greater transparency to government finance and administrative operations.

Clearly, Lebed had what every Russian politician but Yeltsin so glaringly lacked: star quality. He was photogenic, tough, and skilled in the art of sound bites. Lebed became an instant sensation on the strength of his 11 million votes. But toward the end of the initial campaign, there were clear signs that Lebed's campaign was being run in tandem with Yeltsin's, although this was not publicly acknowledged.<sup>222</sup> From late May, 1996, Lebed suddenly had an infusion of campaign money - rumored to have come from Yeltsin's supporters. Lebed also seemed to enjoy the support of Yeltsin's sophisticated advisors, which might have helped him reach the strong third place finish. In the presidential election Lebed received nearly double the votes for Third Force partner Yavlinsky, who placed fourth.

Lebed's rapid rise, however, also underlined the flaws in Russia's infant democracy. In the absence of established parties, Lebed was able to convert meager finances, resourceful campaign aides and assistance from the Kremlin into instant power in the

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<sup>220</sup> *Argumenty y fakty*, Number 22 (May 1996), p. 5.

<sup>221</sup> "Former Defence Minister Grachev Votes; Says Lebed Settled a Score With Him," Radio Russia, Moscow, 3 July 1996, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 3 July 1996.

<sup>222</sup> Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "The Struggle for the Kremlin," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 13, (8 August 1996): 30.

space of a few weeks.<sup>223</sup> If anything, Lebed's spectacular rise to power demonstrated two things: post-Soviet Russia still has no effective multi-party systems, and politicians can quickly use back door deals to manipulate the public.

### C. APPOINTMENT AS SECRETARY OF SECURITY COUNCIL

"I'm something never seen in the Kremlin. I'm fresh blood." -*Associated Press*, 6 July 1996

Lebed was now a powerful, political figure, and Yeltsin took full advantage of his popularity. Lebed's strong third-place finish in the first round of the presidential vote on June 16 prompted Yeltsin to name him his national security adviser and secretary of the security council. The appointment was a blatant political move by the Yeltsin administration to consolidate Lebed voters to ensure that Yeltsin won the run off election against his Communist challenger Zyuganov.

Yeltsin's slim advantage over Zyuganov made it necessary for him to form a strategic alliance. Undoubtedly, Lebed's potential electorate, by its psychology and social makeup, was very close to those of Zyuganov and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.<sup>224</sup> Lebed's success decreased Zyuganov's chances of winning and increased Yeltsin's chances of winning tremendously.

Yeltsin's deal with Lebed turned out to be a brilliant move. Lebed was in the best position to attract votes that otherwise might have gone to the Communists. The Yeltsin-Lebed alliance was seen as the best possible union of the two men as far as the practicalities of the election campaign were concerned. Even if a sizable portion of Lebed's electorate was lost in the second round, the alliance was capable of drawing

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<sup>223</sup>Lee Hockstader "Russian Democracy Gets Another Chance; But Potential for New Kremlin Conflicts Remains After Ailing Yeltsin's Victory," *Washington Post*, 4 July 1996, p. A01.

<sup>224</sup>Andrei Piontkowsky, "A Guide to Lebediana," *Moscow Times*, 9 July 1996.

absentee voters from the first round into voting in the second. For many of Lebed's followers his joining the President's team was a sign of Yeltsin's trustworthiness.<sup>225</sup>

Lebed quickly became the Russian political figure to watch. His strong showing in the first round of voting, and his subsequent elevation to the top security position in Yeltsin's administration, put him in line to be the likely successor of Yeltsin, who was having serious health problems.

Suddenly, around the world, everybody wanted to know who Lebed was. He became known as a king-maker and a proclaimed czar-in-waiting. At the end of the first round, both Yeltsin and the Communists attempted to win Lebed's favors and his eleven million votes. But questions soon arose. Why did Yeltsin, who once forced Lebed into early retirement from his army command for his outspoken views of the administration suddenly suggest that Lebed was his favorite political "son" and his apparent successor? Why did even the Communists, whom Lebed had, in the past, denounced as "imbeciles," offer him the post of Prime Minister if they won?

Many asked Lebed why he decided to support Yeltsin, whom he often criticized. Lebed described communism - the politics of Yeltsin-challenger Gennady Zyuganov - as an old idea that has cost millions of Russian lives. In contrast, Lebed said, "I support the idea by which the whole world lives," meaning the free-market economy.<sup>226</sup>

Lebed also made it clear that he was different from the other officers who had political ambitions. He suggested his agreement with Yeltsin was a way to achieve his greater goal of reforming the once-mighty Russian army. He said, "I tried to change something from the bottom," referring to his efforts to reform the military from within. "But I learned it was a waste of time. To achieve anything, you have to act from the top."<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup>Mikhail Leontyev, "Coalition Of Presidents," *Segodnya*, p. 1., in *Russian Press Digest*, 19 June 1996.

<sup>226</sup>Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>227</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "Russian General Campaigns On Old-Time Soviet Values," *New York Times*, 13 October 1995, p. A1.



Lebed's arrival in the Kremlin was dramatic. He took the job of Secretary of the National Security Council not only with confidence, but with a certain degree of arrogance. Lebed quickly grabbed center stage, boldly asserting his strong views on national security, privatization, banking, tax policy and religion, raising some doubts about his reputation for reform and tolerance.<sup>228</sup> The presence of a loose cannon in the Kremlin, however, did not bode well for political stability in Yeltsin's new presidential term.<sup>229</sup>

Even after Lebed joined the Yeltsin team as the president's national security adviser and the head of the Security Council, his campaign headquarters had an anti-Yeltsin flavor. One poster read, "Yeltsin equals freedom without order, Zyuganov equals order without freedom. Lebed equals freedom and order."<sup>230</sup>

There is no doubt that Lebed's sudden rise in politics fundamentally upset the balance between President and power structures, in place since early 1992.<sup>231</sup> So what exactly were Lebed's new responsibilities?

The National Security Council, according to Yeltsin's new decree, was responsible for implementing the president's authority relating to securing the freedom and rights of citizens, the protection of sovereignty and the independence and integrity of Russia.<sup>232</sup> In

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<sup>228</sup>Ibid.

<sup>229</sup>Thomas de Waal "Autocratic Rule Carries Risk of Political Chaos," *Times* (London), 4 July 1996.

<sup>230</sup>Michael R. Gordon, "A Sharp Struggle for Power Erupts Among Yeltsin's Aides," *International Herald Tribune*, 6 July 1996.

<sup>231</sup>"Ruthless moves head off communist revival," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2, 10 July 1996, p. 8.

<sup>232</sup>The council was created by Yeltsin in the summer of 1991 as a central consultative body. From the beginning its authority was wide-ranging and covered nearly all aspects of politics. The secretary of the council reports only to the president and proposes to him the names of the members. The chairman of the National Security Council is the president himself. Lebed as secretary was in charge of day to day business. The council has the authority to make suggestions for all measures affecting the security of the individual citizen, the society and the state. According to the Moscow Interfax news agency, the council also drafts operative decisions to prevent social,

the United States, the Security Council deals with foreign policy, and the national security adviser is an insignificant figure in domestic politics. In Russia, the Security Council includes the heads of the police as well as the military, and it is far more involved in domestic security issues and foreign policy toward the former Soviet republics than foreign policy toward the West.

Lebed's appointment displaced both the National Security Advisor to the President and the Secretary to the Security Council. Lebed was also given virtually all control of the "power structures" - the ministries of defense, internal affairs, federal security service, and Federal Border Service.<sup>233</sup> Although almost immediately, Yeltsin created a defense council to keep Lebed in check.

Lebed's appointment was confirmation not only of his growing influence but also of an authoritarian tendency within a political system that, elections notwithstanding, remained a curious hybrid of authoritarianism and democracy.<sup>234</sup> The US treated the Russian election as a struggle between good and evil, between reform and a return to the past, and treated the Lebed - Yeltsin alliance with optimism.

With his look of a cool and professional soldier, Lebed captured the public's imagination. After winning the vote for Yeltsin, he was dismissed just four months after his appointment. Still, Lebed stood to become the most politically viable presidential figure for the Russian electorate in the 21st century.<sup>235</sup>

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economic, military and ecological crises. It is further charged with defining the vital interests of the society and the state. Sessions of the National Security Council are attended by the Prime Minister, the Ministers for Defense, Interior and Foreign Affairs, the domestic intelligence chief and the foreign espionage director. See *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 10 July 1996.

<sup>233</sup>"Ruthless moves head off communist revival," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2, 10 July 1996, p. 8.

<sup>234</sup>Archie Brown, "The Hammer and Sick," *Guardian*, 5 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>235</sup>Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

#### D. THE GREAT PURGE OF '96

"God created people big and small. Colonel Colt invented his revolver to even things out." - Lebed on Mayak Radio Network, Moscow, 24 June 1996.

Yeltsin paid a high price to convince Lebed to join his team. For some incumbents in Yeltsin's administration, the appointment of Lebed as National Security Advisor was disastrous. Within two days after arriving in the Kremlin, Lebed took a leading part in a broad reorganization of the government. With Yeltsin's approval, he fired the head of the Federal Security Service, the defense minister, the head of the presidential guard, a top aide and seven army generals. Lebed dismissed the leading members of the inner circle that the President had assembled around him since August of 1991. All of them resented any intrusion by Lebed into their domain.<sup>236</sup> The first sacrifice to appease Lebed was the removal of his old rival Defense Minister General Pavel Grachev.

Lebed's reason for Grachev's dismissal was that he had allegedly attempted to mount a "third coup" during the night of 17-18 June with the help of some of his close confidants. The claims of a coup were doubted by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and a number of Duma deputies, including former Foreign Minister Kozyrev.<sup>237</sup> Grachev himself said that Lebed "clearly tried to settle a score with him."<sup>238</sup>

Whether Grachev was involved in a coup plot or not, the Russian press quickly announced the dismissal by Lebed of a group of Grachev's "friends."<sup>239</sup> The seven generals

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<sup>236</sup>"Ruthless moves head off communist revival," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2, 10 July 1996, p. 8.

<sup>237</sup>Ibid.

<sup>238</sup>"Former Defence Minister Grachev Votes; Says Lebed Settled a Score With Him," Radio Russia, Moscow, 3 July 1996, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 3 July 1996.

<sup>239</sup>Dismissed were: Col Gen Viktor Barynkin, First Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Chief of the Main Operations Directorate; Col Gen Anatoly Bogdanov, a First Deputy Chief of the General Staff; Col Gen Vyacheslav Zherebtsov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Chief of the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate; Col Gen Dmitry Kharchenko, Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Chief of the Main Directorate for Military Cooperation; Lt. Gen Valery Lapshov, Grachev's senior Military Assistant; and

worked closely with the defense minister, and they complained that the dismissals were carried out without being told why they were being fired. Defense Ministry staff argued that the action was reminiscent of the purges perpetrated by Stalin and Khrushchev.<sup>240</sup>

The post-election purge was not confined to Grachev's entourage. The hard-line Chief of the Main Security Guard Directorate, Col Gen Alexander Korzhakov, was also removed, along with his friend, Director of the ex-KGB internal security service (now known as the Federal Security Service) Army General Mikhail Barsukov.<sup>241</sup> The last to go was First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets, in charge of the military industrial complex and nuclear energy. These leaders were extremely unpopular with the Russian public, which largely blamed them for instigating and prosecuting the war in Chechnya.<sup>242</sup>

After removing the likely trouble-makers among Yeltsin's Kremlin circle, Lebed announced his intention of carrying out "a serious reorganization of the apparatus of the Security Council".<sup>243</sup> Lebed said he was "free of megalomania", but he planned to institute coordinated policies to replace a system "whereby each power ministry used to act seemingly independently, but if martial law or a state of emergency was introduced, the whole system turned into a single fist".<sup>244</sup>

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Col Gen Vladimir Shulikov, Deputy Commander-in-Chief (Armaments) Ground Forces. Another close associate of Gen Grachev who subsequently became a casualty was Lt. Gen Sergei Zdorikov, Chief of the Main Directorate for Educational Work.

<sup>240</sup>Igor Chernyak, "Platoons Of Generals Will Be Fired," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, p. 2, in *Russian Press Digest*, 2 July 1996.

<sup>241</sup>The removal of Gen Korzhakov coincided with a reorganisation of the Main Security Guard Directorate. A Presidential decree redesignated the former Main Security Guard Directorate as the Federal Security Guard Service, and appointed Lt Gen Yury Krapivin its first head. Col Anatoly Kuznetsov replaced Gen Korzhakov as the President's personal bodyguard. "Ruthless moves head off communist revival," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2, 10 July 1996, p. 8.

<sup>242</sup>Ariel Cohen, "Czar Lebed?" *Washington Times*, 3 July 1996, p. A17.

<sup>243</sup>"Ruthless moves head off communist revival," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2, 10 July 1996, p. 8.

<sup>244</sup>*Ibid.*

Lebed regarded purging corruption within the power structures as merely the first step towards reform. In addition to wanting to maintain the 'single fist', Lebed also visualized "a single system for the country's defense".<sup>245</sup>

Emphasizing his growing thirst for power, Lebed suggested that the constitution be amended to make him Vice President. Lebed's new appointment and Yeltsin's promise to incorporate some of Lebed's ideas into his program created the suspicion that Lebed was serving as an informal Vice President already. Although Lebed was not officially in the line of succession to Yeltsin, he obviously thought he had the support to make this happen in due course.<sup>246</sup>

Lebed's strategy for expanding his power was both combative and cunning, not surprising since boxing and chess were always his favorite pastimes.<sup>247</sup> He demanded control over the "power structures" and formation of a government, but this was authority that previously only belonged to the President and the Prime Minister.

He repeated his earlier demands for a large role in economic affairs, saying he wanted to have a say in virtually all aspects of national policy.<sup>248</sup> Lebed maintained he deserved a role in economic policy because it affected national security, but Alexander Livshits, Yeltsin's chief economic aide, insisted that full responsibility for economic matters would remain with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

Recruiting Lebed was Yeltsin's last ditch method of salvaging his political career. Yet immediately after the election, Yeltsin had to deal with this minister whose popularity and ambition quickly became a liability.

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<sup>245</sup>Ibid.

<sup>246</sup>Mikhail Leontyev, "Coalition Of Presidents," *Segodnya*, p. 1., in *Russian Press Digest*, 19 June 1996.

<sup>247</sup>"Lebed Attacks Power Transfer, Says Yeltsin Should Step Down During Illness," *New York Times*, 29 September 1996, A2.

<sup>248</sup>*AP Worldstream*, Moscow, 9 July 1996.

## E. LEBED MAKES PEACE IN CHECHNYA

Although it was difficult to categorize Lebed's political philosophy, he was an outspoken critic of the Chechen war from the beginning. Lebed was the nation's most famous politician to denounce the conflict. After Yeltsin chose Lebed as his chief military and security official, many thought the best hope for peace yet had arrived. Even skeptics assumed the fighting could finally stop.<sup>249</sup>

While some said he was a nationalist who believed in an expansive Russia, Lebed was unflinching in his calls for the war to end.<sup>250</sup> So not surprisingly, as one of the first actions as Yeltsin's national security adviser, he traveled to the war-torn region to make peace. It was a mission that was expected to bring discredit upon him. Just as Lebed was supposedly sent to Moldova to flounder in an ethnic conflict as a check to his mounting political appeal, he was given the task shunned by every government official in Moscow. As in Moldova, he did not fail.

Lebed successfully concluded a peace pact with the Chechen military chief of staff, Aslan Maskhadov, that ended more than 20 months of bloodshed. Without committing Moscow to granting Chechen independence, the settlement called for demilitarization of the shattered republic and a "cooling-off" period of as long as five years before the sovereignty question was decided.<sup>251</sup> The agreement was greeted around the world with approval, relief, hope and even jubilation. It boosted his popularity among Russians but met with harsh resistance in Moscow from politicians who accused him of selling out the Russian army.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup>Michael Specter, "Despite a Truce, Russians Attack Chechen Villages," *New York Times*, 11 July 1996, p. A1.

<sup>250</sup>Ibid.

<sup>251</sup>Carol J. Williams, "Lebed Ties Political Fate to Chechen Peace Pact," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1996, p. A4.

<sup>252</sup>Sergei Shargorodsky, "Yeltsin Ousts Lebed as Security Chief," *AP Worldstream*, 17 October 1996.

Lebed was effective in Chechnya because he was the first senior Russian leader to admit what was obvious to anyone who had been in the region: the Russian Army was being decimated by dedicated Muslim guerrillas.<sup>253</sup> Since the war began, Lebed was one of the few Russian generals who had the courage to condemn it. More than 50,000 people were killed during this Yeltsin-backed war and 300,000 made homeless in a region with a total population of about a million.<sup>254</sup> As an army airborne commander in Afghanistan he had seen it all before, and in September 1995 he prophetically vowed, "I am the man who can stop the war."<sup>255</sup>

Lebed once called the military operation a "national disgrace." Comparing the Russian Army to the United States, he said, "By American standards, losing 20 per cent of the hostages in an operation is considered unsatisfactory...It is interesting - what standards operate here?"<sup>256</sup> The war itself convinced many people that a Yeltsin victory was impossible. In February, 1996 Yeltsin said publicly that unless he found a way to end the ruinous conflict, he would never win re-election. Shortly afterward he declared a cease-fire, although fighting actually increased.<sup>257</sup>

Lebed frequently told foreign reporters that he would not mind seeing Chechnya attain its long-stated goal of becoming a separate country. With the Russian news media,

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<sup>253</sup>Michael Specter, "Shake-Up in Russia: The Overview; Yeltsin Angrily Announces Dismissal of Aide He Hailed as a Likely Political Heir," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>254</sup>Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>255</sup>Gwynne Dyer, "A Good Day in Russia: Yeltsin's Allies Will Give Country Stability at the Centre," *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 July 1996, p. B2.

<sup>256</sup>Helen Womack, "Chechen Leader Delivers Fresh Taunt to Yeltsin," *Independent*, 23 January 1996, p. 7.

<sup>257</sup>Michael Specter, "Despite a Truce, Russians Attack Chechen Villages," *New York Times*, 11 July 1996, p. A1.

however, he sounded more like Yeltsin, saying it made little sense to separate Chechnya from the rest of the nation.<sup>258</sup>

In negotiating the peace agreement, Lebed obviously benefited from his experience as a commander of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. As a military man, he could not help but see that Russian troops could never achieve any military success in the war.<sup>259</sup> He believed that Chechens should have a right to determine their own statehood by referendum. He also insisted that Yeltsin should pull out Russian troops and cut Chechnya out of the budget.<sup>260</sup>

Chechens and Russians alike cheered Lebed for negotiating the settlement for the shattered republic, but some observers warned that his political fortunes were riding on the success of what could prove an unmanageable agreement. According to Dzhabrail Z. Gakayev, director of the Chechen Cultural Center in Moscow and a professor of anthropology, "Lebed may have achieved peace in Chechnya too fast and too simply for it to last."<sup>261</sup> Once he achieved the peace, all the elites in Moscow turned against him-- Lebed had betrayed the Russia they saved.

## **F. LEBED IS DISMISSED**

"I don't know how to bow down to power." - *CNN*, 17 October 1996

Yeltsin's decision to distance himself from the man who almost by himself managed to bring the ruinous war in Chechnya to a halt, and who polls showed was Russia's most

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<sup>258</sup>Ibid.

<sup>259</sup>Carol J. Williams, "Lebed Ties Political Fate to Chechen Peace Pact," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1996, p. A4.

<sup>260</sup>Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>261</sup>Carol J. Williams, "Lebed Ties Political Fate to Chechen Peace Pact," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1996, p. A4.



popular politician, had become almost inevitable.<sup>262</sup> In a nationwide survey in September 1996, Lebed was called Russia's most trusted politician with more than twice the rating of Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, who came in second. Yeltsin was a distant fifth.<sup>263</sup> After his appointment, Lebed clashed frequently and publicly with Prime Minister Viktor S. Chernomyrdin and the presidential chief of staff Anatoly B. Chubais, with whom he had been running the country in the absence of the ailing President.<sup>264</sup>

Therefore, just four months after publicly embracing him as a political heir, Yeltsin angrily appeared on national television and dismissed Lebed. Yeltsin said his behavior and outspokenness were damaging to the country.<sup>265</sup> In his address to the nation, the President said Lebed had made "several mistakes" which were "inadmissible and detrimental to Russia."<sup>266</sup> He criticized Lebed for his inability to establish and maintain good contacts with other key government officials and work together in a team.

Yeltsin also expressed his displeasure with the fact that a situation had developed as if an election race were going on already, although the next election was four years away. Even Prime Minister Chernomyrdin accused Lebed of possessing a "Napoleon

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<sup>262</sup>Michael Specter, "Shake-Up in Russia: The Overview; Yeltsin Angrily Announces Dismissal of Aide He Hailed as a Likely Political Heir," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>263</sup>For poll results, see Dave Carpenter, *AP Worldstream*, 17 October 1996. Lebed maintained he paid little attention to opinion polls, stating, "I spit on popularity ratings. I live and serve as I see fit." *Agumenty i fakty*, no. 14, April 1995, p.3.

<sup>264</sup>Michael Specter, "Shake-Up in Russia: The Overview; Yeltsin Angrily Announces Dismissal of Aide He Hailed as a Likely Political Heir," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>265</sup>Sergei Shargorodsky, "Yeltsin Ousts Lebed as Security Chief," *AP Worldstream*, 17 October 1996.

<sup>266</sup>Tatyana Malkina, "Alexander Lebed Ousted From Kremlin," *Segodnya*, p. 1., in *Russian Press Digest*, 18 October 1996.

complex,"<sup>267</sup> incorporating "irresponsibility and incompetence that are clearly brimming over, especially lately."<sup>268</sup> In fact, Lebed attempted to resign weeks before, but at the time Yeltsin "urged him to be patient and learn to get along with others."<sup>269</sup>

Yeltsin accused him of excessive ambition and complained that Lebed made decisions without consulting the president and the rest of the government.<sup>270</sup> "There has to be a united team" to govern the country. "The team should pull together, work like a fist. But now we have a situation whereby Lebed is splitting the team apart. This is totally unacceptable."<sup>271</sup>

Most likely, one of the biggest factors in Lebed's dismissal was Yeltsin's health. At the time, an ailing Yeltsin was awaiting a serious and much-postponed heart operation, and the struggle to succeed him became intense. This battle--mainly between Chernomyrdin, Chubais, and Lebed--made coherent government impossible. It also ensured a bitter struggle to control the security forces, whose support in the event of Yeltsin's death would have been very important.<sup>272</sup>

The President was also displeased at Lebed's contacts with his former chief bodyguard Alexander Korzhakov.<sup>273</sup> Korzhakov had accumulated unprecedented power

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<sup>267</sup>Michael Specter, "Shake-Up in Russia: The Overview; Yeltsin Angrily Announces Dismissal of Aide He Hailed as a Likely Political Heir," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>268</sup>Sergei Shargorodsky, "Yeltsin Ousts Lebed as Security Chief," *AP Worldstream*, 17 October 1996.

<sup>269</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup>Michael Specter, "Shake-Up in Russia: The Overview; Yeltsin Angrily Announces Dismissal of Aide He Hailed as a Likely Political Heir," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>272</sup>Dominic Lieven, "Is Russia Ready for a Cromwell?" *Times* (London), 18 October 1996.

<sup>273</sup>Tatyana Malkina, "Alexander Lebed Ousted From Kremlin," *Segodnya*, p. 1., in *Russian Press Digest*, 18 October 1996.

and influence inside the Kremlin until he was removed in the purge before the run off election. In his televised address, the President mentioned their recent joint appearance at a public ceremony in the city of Tula with visible outrage.<sup>274</sup>

On the one hand, Lebed may gain much support from his dismissal. The Russian people, while extremely weary of politics and elections, are always attracted to principled leaders who have been sacrificed by their bosses.<sup>275</sup> His dramatic dismissal could energize voters and allow Lebed to rally public discontent and disgust over government-as-usual.<sup>276</sup> Yeltsin knows that better than anyone, because he was in the same position in 1987, when Mikhail S. Gorbachev purged him from the ruling elite of the Communist Party. This act solidified his popularity with the type of average voters who later said they supported Lebed.

On the other hand, Lebed lost an important platform for his statements and ideas. As secretary of the Security Council, he got a lot of press coverage when he criticized the government. As an outsider, he will continue to get coverage, but not as extensive as he used to get.

Lebed made it clear Russia had not seen the last of him. He said he will come to power in the next election so he can clean up the mess this country's in.<sup>277</sup> Lebed said, "I honestly tried to do all I could to stop the war, to carry out military reform, to organize a war against crime, but it's useless when people with rotten cores head law enforcement structures."<sup>278</sup> Lebed was also free to attack the economic program of Chernomyrdin and

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<sup>274</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "A General on His Own," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>275</sup>Michael Specter, "Shake-Up in Russia: The Overview; Yeltsin Angrily Announces Dismissal of Aide He Hailed as a Likely Political Heir," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>276</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "A General on His Own," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>277</sup>"Lebed Plans For Political Comeback," CNN Show: *CNN Today*, 18 October 1996, Transcript # 96101806V33.

<sup>278</sup>Dave Carpenter, *AP Worldstream*, 17 October 1996.

Chubais, since he detested them both and felt they helped create a climate where cronyism and corruption were as common as capitalism and commerce.<sup>279</sup>

Lebed's dismissal was anything but unexpected. He was taken into Yeltsin's team to ensure victory in the elections. After he served that purpose, he was dismissed. No other figure in Yeltsin's administration had anything approaching Lebed's appeal to the public as an incorruptible outsider in Kremlin politics.<sup>280</sup> No other figure had his potential to forge a nationalist and ex-communist coalition, without directly threatening the big private economic interests.<sup>281</sup> Lebed became just too dangerous to keep anywhere near real political power.

## G. ALLIES AND ENEMIES

"Yes, I have many enemies. Many enemies adorn a man."

- *Die Woche* (Hamburg), 1 December 1995

The extraordinary rise of Lebed, like all politicians, would not have been possible without the strong support of close friends and associates. Likewise, his adversaries also played an important part in defining the role that Lebed would play for the Russian people. An analysis of his allies and enemies is especially relevant after the bitter political struggle that erupted soon after his appointment to Yeltsin's administration, ending in Lebed's dismissal.

### 1. Bergman, Krivilev, and Skokov

Lebed actually began his political career when he was commander of the 14th Army stationed in Moldova. At that time, he relied mostly on a group of senior officers of his army. The most valuable of these officers was the region's military commandant at the

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<sup>279</sup>Michael Specter, "Shake-Up in Russia: The Overview; Yeltsin Angrily Announces Dismissal of Aide He Hailed as a Likely Political Heir," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>280</sup>Dominic Lieven, "Is Russia Ready for a Cromwell?" *Times* (London), 18 October 1996.

<sup>281</sup>*Ibid.*

time, Colonel Mikhail Bergman. Under Lebed in the 14th Army, Bergman and other officers supplied materials compromising Trans-Dniester President Igor Smirnov and Security Minister Vadim Shevtsov.<sup>282</sup> On the basis of those documents, Lebed attacked the local authorities, accusing them of corruption practices and other wrongdoings. They protested, saying Lebed interfered in the domestic affairs of a foreign state.<sup>283</sup> But Lebed persisted and soon he became known across Russia as an intrepid corruption fighter.

Following his forced resignation from the army, Lebed started exploiting the newly acquired image of a victim of anti-corruption activities and a staunch "fighter for the truth." In August 1995, he set up a new movement called "Honor and Motherland." At the movement's founding conference, his close associates formed a team which included several 14th Army officers and some Moscow friends.<sup>284</sup> At the head of the team was retired General Vladimir Krivilev, whom Lebed met three years earlier during a military exercise. Krivilev became Lebed's chief policy adviser. Eventually, that team became the backbone of Lebed's parliamentary and presidential campaigns.

Soon Yuri Skokov, leader of the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO), gained the support of Lebed and his Honor and Motherland movement. The later split between Lebed and Skokov eventually resulted in KRO's crushing defeat at the December parliamentary elections. The only reason Lebed was elected as a Duma member was because of his decision to run simultaneously on an individual ticket. Krivilev asserted that Skokov plotted with foreign and home intelligence services to remove Lebed from the political scene because he was the "carrier of the Russian national idea."<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup>Alexei Chelnokov, "Lebed's Entourage," *Izvestia*, p. 5, in *Russian Press Digest*, 11 July 1996.

<sup>283</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup>It is quite possible that this was the real reason intelligence and security service leaders Korzhakov, Barsukov and Soskovets were dismissed in the purge after Lebed's arrival in the Kremlin. See Alexei Chelnokov, "Lebed's Entourage," *Izvestia*, p. 5, in *Russian Press Digest*, 11 July 1996.

In the wake of the KRO fiasco, Lebed said that he would "try to make a pact" with the Communists, who had swept the election.<sup>286</sup> The fact that Lebed apparently seriously considered an alliance with the victorious Communists in December 1995 suggests that his main operating principle when it came to allies was flexibility. Adaptability, and not democracy, was indeed one of his stronger attributes throughout his rise in politics.

## **2. Role Models: Lenin, De Gaulle, and Pinochet**

Lebed's role models are also questionable to those who are looking for a leader who might follow in Yeltsin's footsteps. Interestingly, Lebed admires the founder of the Soviet state, V. I. Lenin: "Lenin was the only man in our history who combined theory and practice in Russian politics."<sup>287</sup> Evidently, Lebed venerates him despite numerous revelations in the Russian media about Lenin's personal involvement in hostage executions and the mass murder of Russian peasants, military officers, clergy, and intellectuals during and after the Russian Civil War.

Other leaders whom Lebed admires include Charles De Gaulle and former Chilean dictator, General Augusto Pinochet.<sup>288</sup> On who he would like to emulate, the most frequent leader Lebed cited was Pinochet. He once expressed admiration for how General Pinochet brought order to Chile while having to kill "only 3,000 people."<sup>289</sup> Lebed himself was often called a possible "Russian Pinochet" by the Moscow media, although after entering politics he adhered neither to Pinochet's free-market policy nor to his anti-

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<sup>286</sup>Jonas Bernstein, "The Making Of Russia's Star General In Kremlin," *Moscow Times*, 28 June 1996.

<sup>287</sup>Svetlana Gamova, "Alexander Lebed: sama zhizn zastavliayet generalov zanimat' sia politikoy," *Izvestiya*, 20 July 1994, p. 1.

<sup>288</sup>Ibid.

<sup>289</sup>Lebed later distanced himself from comments expressing admiration for the dictator. See Robin Dixon, "So Far, Lebed's Words Speak Louder Than Actions," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 July 1996, and Ann Leslie, "Whatever Russia's Election Result, Lebed is the Man to Watch," *Daily Mail*, 4 July 1996, p. 24.

communism. Slowly, however, Lebed came to appreciate a free market economy and has spoken out against communism.

Lebed's role model from the West was another general-turned-politician, Charles De Gaulle, because he "restored France from the ruins."<sup>290</sup> Although he occasionally resented the West, he also appreciated comparisons to American General Colin Powell. Lebed met General Powell when the former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff visited Lebed's elite paratrooper division in Tula in 1991. In an interview he said that it would be "fantastic," if they ended up on opposite ends of the Kremlin-White House hot line. He explained, "We are both patriots and professionals, and we understand what war really means."<sup>291</sup>

The fact that both men were generals was about the only semblance between the two, but Lebed respected that fact a great deal: "Powell knows the price of life and the price of blood. As professionals, we hate war most of all. All wars are started by people who never had to serve, by people who know their children and their grandchildren would not be participating." Maybe the common link is that Powell and Lebed, according to an American journalist, both "project incorruptibility to two societies that have come to doubt the morality and honesty of their political leaders."<sup>292</sup>

### **3. Ilyushin, Berezovsky, and Golovkov**

During the presidential campaign, new allies emerged. They were government officials and financiers, the most prominent being Viktor Ilyushin, President Yeltsin's chief aide, and Boris Berezovsky, President of the powerful LogoVAZ group and owner of a huge share of the Russian ORT Television Network. In 1993, the company's turnover amounted to 250 million dollars, and it was Berezovsky who actually financed Lebed's

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<sup>290</sup>John Morrison, "Many Russians See Tough General as Next Head of State," *Reuters Limited*, 10 October 1995.

<sup>291</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "Russian General Campaigns On Old-Time Soviet Values," *New York Times*, 13 October 1995, p. A1.

<sup>292</sup>Jim Hoagland, "The Challenge of the Generals," *Washington Post*, 12 October 1995.

election campaign.<sup>293</sup> After Lebed was dismissed, he turned on Berezovsky, accusing him of conspiring to get him out of the way.<sup>294</sup>

Soon, a group of professional image-makers was hired to work on Lebed's new image. The group was headed by Alexei Golovkov, the Duma member who organized campaigns for Russia's Choice in 1993, presidential campaigns in Tajikistan and Belarus and governor elections campaigns in some Russian territories. Director of the Institute for a National Model of Economy Vitaly Naishul wrote Lebed's presidential election platform, called "Truth and Order." In it, Lebed was presented as a "general-politician capable of putting an end to the current mess in the country."<sup>295</sup> Journalist Leonid Radzikhovsky coined Lebed's catchy slogans which soon became very popular across Russia. Campaign manager Yulia Rusova headed Lebed's propaganda department.<sup>296</sup> Joint efforts by all these people resulted in boosting Lebed's rating dramatically.

When Lebed was appointed Secretary of the Security Council, Golovkov's team stepped aside. Policy decision-making became the responsibility of a group of advisers headed by General Krivilev.<sup>297</sup>

#### **4. Grachev**

No analysis of Lebed's allies and enemies can be made without mentioning the name of army general and former defense minister Pavel Grachev. The rivalry between Lebed and Grachev was not just conflicting political ambitions. More than that, it

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<sup>293</sup>Alexei Chelnokov, "Lebed's Entourage," *Izvestia*, p. 5, in *Russian Press Digest*, 11 July 1996.

<sup>294</sup>Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky, a banker who owns the Russian Independent Television Network, together virtually control the Russian airwaves. See Alessandra Stanley, "A General on His Own," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>295</sup>Alexei Chelnokov, "Lebed's Entourage," *Izvestia*, p. 5, in *Russian Press Digest*, 11 July 1996.

<sup>296</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup>*Ibid.*



involved a clash of personalities that was played out in a stylized drama upon the hearts and minds of Russia's armed forces.<sup>298</sup>

Early in their careers, Lebed and Grachev were inseparable. In the early 1970s, Lebed was Grachev's deputy at the Ryazan paratrooper school. Lebed and Grachev were mobilized together to fight in Afghanistan, and both were honored as Heroes of the Soviet Union. When Grachev moved up the ranks to command Russia's airborne forces, again his deputy was Lebed.

After the August 1991 coup, when the emergency committee tried to seize power from then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Lebed and Grachev became bitter enemies. They began feuding in private and public until the day Lebed was able to take final vengeance and force Grachev from the Kremlin. Their first disagreement was on what to do with Lebed's airborne division that Lebed had ordered to surround the Russian parliament building. For years, Lebed claimed that Grachev wavered in his decision to defend the building. After the failure of the coup, Grachev entered the circle of those close to Yeltsin, and by the spring of 1992 he was appointed defense minister of the new Russia.

The new commander of the airborne forces should have been Lebed, but for some reason, he was not appointed.<sup>299</sup> Instead, Lebed was sent to command the 14th Army in Moldova, where a civil war was beginning. Most likely, his new assignment was Grachev's deliberate attempt to end Lebed's career. Grachev probably thought Lebed would fail miserably trying to make peace in Moldova, and would start an international scandal that would ultimately be blamed on Lebed. A Russian retired colonel who served in military counterintelligence said, "This was a fatal mistake on Grachev's part. He gravely underestimated the capabilities of his primary, future rival."<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup>Alexander Zhilin, "For the Soul of the Russian Army," *Moscow Times*, 29 June 1996.

<sup>299</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup>Viktor Paramoshin quoted in Alexander Zhilin, "For the Soul of the Russian Army," *Moscow Times*, 29 June 1996.

Eventually, Grachev forced Lebed to resign in 1995. But Lebed's new career as a politician was even more stunning. With a strong third place showing in the presidential election of 1996, he was able to dictate terms in order to join Yeltsin's campaign for the second-round vote. When Lebed came to the Kremlin, he not only had Grachev dismissed, but the officers he had advanced within the Defense Ministry. Lebed had achieved the final revenge.

## 5. Yeltsin

President Yeltsin served as both an ally and enemy throughout Lebed's rise in politics. In both roles, Yeltsin boosted Lebed's popularity and political career. Lebed's disagreements with Yeltsin are well known, the most popular being over the working relationship Lebed had with the president and the rest of the government which ended when Yeltsin fired him. But before his appointment to Yeltsin's administration, Lebed appeared highly unlikely to ever reach satisfactory working terms with the President. On final analysis, it was Yeltsin's decision to give Lebed power in the Russian government, and it was Yeltsin's decision to take that power away.

After being promoted to lead the 14th Army in Moldova, Lebed did everything in his power to undermine the new government there, often acting in defiance of his superiors in Moscow, Defense Minister Grachev and Yeltsin. While still in the army, he often referred to Yeltsin as "a minus."<sup>301</sup> In October 1993, when Yeltsin confronted a mutinous parliament, he sided with Yeltsin. But as he watched the once-proud Soviet Army collapse around him, Lebed became a bitter critic of Yeltsin's new Russia.

Lebed attacked Yeltsin's economic policy, foreign policy, and failing democratic reforms. His dramatic rise to power, however, was similar in some ways to Yeltsin himself. Similar to Yeltsin, Lebed was not a party politician and liked the roles of rebel and independent. Journalist Carey Scott stated in the *Sunday Times* (London), that Lebed's stubborn contempt for inept bureaucrats was strongly reminiscent of Yeltsin in an earlier day:

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<sup>301</sup>Larry Ryckman, "Russia's Most Outspoken General To Be Sacked," *AP Worldstream*, 4 August 1994.

Many believed that Yeltsin teamed with Lebed because he saw so much of himself in him. Both came from the provinces, growing up believing in communism but later rejecting it. Both their fathers were caught up in Stalin's purges and imprisoned in labor camps. Yeltsin's father was imprisoned after he complained about canteen food, and Lebed's for twice arriving late to his work as a carpenter. Both enjoyed a man-of-the-people image, Yeltsin preferring Moscow trolley buses instead of limousines in the early days of his rise to power and Lebed happy to let everyone know that he lived in a deteriorated block of apartments rather than an exclusive government compound.<sup>302</sup>

The political alliance between the two was simply convenient for votes, and destined for trouble. Both men were direct, stubborn and unaccustomed to sharing power.<sup>303</sup> Yeltsin used Lebed to beat Zyuganov, and with that accomplished, Yeltsin made the momentous decision to destroy him. The decision may backfire, because just as Yeltsin once became Gorbachev's principal political rival, Yeltsin became Lebed's main political competitor.

#### **6. Chernomyrdin, Chubais, and Kulikov**

Lebed's other enemies were the principal players in Yeltsin's administration--Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, Yeltsin's chief of staff, Anatoly B. Chubais, and Interior Minister Anatoly S. Kulikov, one of the two top Russian generals leading the war in Chechnya.

Kulikov, one of the architects of Moscow's brutal military campaign in Chechnya, was almost as disruptive a force in Moscow as Lebed.<sup>304</sup> Two months after taking office as national security chief, Lebed demanded the dismissal of Kulikov, arguing that Russia could not afford to continue its costly offensive in Chechnya. Yeltsin instructed General Kulikov he would stay in the administration.<sup>305</sup> Kulikov, as head of Yeltsin's Defense Council, represented a critical balance to Lebed's power.

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<sup>302</sup>Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

<sup>303</sup>"Farewell, for Now, to Mr. Lebed," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A36.

<sup>304</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "A General on His Own," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

A day before Lebed was fired, Kulikov charged that Lebed was planning to use a new elite group as a private army to stage a coup. It was a preposterous charge from one of Lebed's most hated enemies, a man who repeatedly referred to Lebed's peace settlement in Chechnya as "high treason."<sup>306</sup> Lebed denied the accusation and said he would soon release evidence that Kulikov was personally responsible for mass murder while he commanded Russian troops in Chechnya.<sup>307</sup>

The Kremlin, Lebed told reporters, was not big enough for both him and Kulikov and Yeltsin would have to choose between them. This was the second time that Lebed made such a challenge, and the President could not ignore it.<sup>308</sup>

Lebed also despised Chubais, the skillful bureaucrat who orchestrated Yeltsin's 1996 re-election. Chubais used Yeltsin's access to almost unlimited state and private financing and control over Russian media to keep his rivals off balance and out of the limelight.<sup>309</sup> Lebed maintained that Chubais had masterminded his fall from grace because he "wants to be President."<sup>310</sup> Though it is unlikely that the deeply unpopular Chubais will ever run for elected office himself, he surely will try to use his power and experience to keep Lebed from ever ruling the country.<sup>311</sup> Chubais remained a strong influence behind the scenes of government after Lebed's dismissal.

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<sup>306</sup>Michael Specter, "Shake-Up in Russia: The Overview; Yeltsin Angrily Announces Dismissal of Aide He Hailed as a Likely Political Heir," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>307</sup>Peter Ford and Marshall Ingwerson, "Lebed's Sacking Unlikely to End Kremlin Intrigue," *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 October 1996, p. 1.

<sup>308</sup>Ibid.

<sup>309</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "A General on His Own," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>310</sup>Ibid.

<sup>311</sup>Ibid.

## 7. Korzhakov

Late in his tenure in the Kremlin, Lebed formed an alliance with Yeltsin's former chief bodyguard, General Alexander Korzhakov. Korzhakov, who was Yeltsin's long-time confidante, gave Lebed access to "compromising material" that Korzhakov once threatened to disclose.<sup>312</sup> Korzhakov had gathered the material on his enemies during his eleven years as Yeltsin's aide<sup>313</sup>

Yeltsin referred bitterly to Lebed's new political ally in his speech announcing Lebed's dismissal, saying "He [Lebed] took Korzhakov to Tula."<sup>314</sup> In Tula, Lebed presented Korzhakov as his future successor in the Duma. But the night before, Lebed supposedly had a serious talk in the Kremlin, during which he promised not to make friends with Korzhakov.<sup>315</sup> The well-connected and KGB-informed Korzhakov retained considerable power and influence around the country -- the kind Lebed felt he needed in a presidential race.<sup>316</sup> But Korzhakov, unlike Lebed, was hardly a symbol of reform and opposition to corruption. It was Lebed's tight contacts with the military and the dismissed General Korzhakov that were believed to be last straw that compelled Yeltsin to fire him.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>312</sup>Peter Ford and Marshall Ingwersen, "Lebed's Sacking Unlikely to End Kremlin Intrigue," *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 October 1996, p. 1.

<sup>313</sup>Stepan Kisilyov, "Lebed Is Done Away With? What Next? *Izvestia*, p. 1, in *Russian Press Digest*, 18 October 1996.

<sup>314</sup>Natalya Kalashnikova, "Taming Of 'Home-Bred Bonaparte'," *Kommersant-Daily*, pp. 1, 3, in *Russian Press Digest*, 18 October 1996.

<sup>315</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "A General on His Own," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>317</sup>Natalya Kalashnikova, "Taming Of 'Home-Bred Bonaparte'," *Kommersant-Daily*, pp. 1, 3, in *Russian Press Digest*, 18 October 1996.

## V. LEBED'S VIEWS AND POLICIES

If Lebed does become Russia's next president, just what does he stand for? During his rise in politics, Lebed defended law and order, integrity, and a strong state. But this does not help predict the kinds of policies he is likely to favor.

Does Lebed strongly believe in democracy? Not really. He once said he "could not care less for democracy," and the ideas of his closest advisers suggests that the democratic process remains low on his list of priorities.<sup>318</sup> He is convinced that Russia must be ruled by a strong hand and quotes Plato to the effect that absolute democracy leads to dictatorship and tyranny.<sup>319</sup> Lebed seemed to never talk about democracy -- only about restoring order: "Power must be strong. 'Patriot' will never be a dirty word, whereas 'democrat' has already become one."

In a way, Lebed's meteoric rise from ousted paratrooper general to president-in-waiting was similar to Yeltsin's own turbulent arrival on the political scene. But unlike Yeltsin, whose gospel was the destruction of communism and the introduction of democratic reforms, Lebed was banging on a different drum.<sup>320</sup>

Lebed's democratic credentials were vacillating at best. He once confessed that "To conduct diplomatic negotiations with some parliament to receive power and to maneuver is not my style."<sup>321</sup> He also described himself as a "semi-democrat," and expressed his lack of faith in the parliamentary system.<sup>322</sup> During his election campaign,

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<sup>318</sup> "A General More to Fear Than Greet," *Moscow Times*, 27 June 1996.

<sup>319</sup> Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "The Struggle for the Kremlin," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 13, (8 August 1996): 30.

<sup>320</sup> Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

<sup>321</sup> Alexander Mukomolov, "Alexander Lebed: '14 Armiya v Pridnestrovye-chistaya politika," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 27 October 1994, p. 1.

<sup>322</sup> Lee Hockstader "Russian Democracy Gets Another Chance; But Potential for New Kremlin Conflicts Remains After Ailing Yeltsin's Victory," *Washington Post*, 4 July 1996, p. A01.

Lebed initially impressed US officials by his opposition to the war in Chechnya, Russian expansion, and his new stated openness to NATO expansion. After his appointment to the administration, however, he showed another side, making openly anti-Semitic statements and criticizing Western religions.<sup>323</sup>

Does he believe in the free market? Basically, yes, but not out of conviction. Rather he is realist enough to understand that a market economy of some kind is the only economic engine capable of making Russia powerful.<sup>324</sup> But the kind of market economy he is likely to favor is not the kind that Yeltsin or the rest of his administration may have in mind. He once said, "The Russians do not want the stagnation of advanced socialism or degradation of capitalism - we want our own Russian way of development."<sup>325</sup> Lebed stressed the country was in need of a policy of national pragmatism, and believed that nothing short of a strong-handed policy could help achieve decent living standards.

Is Lebed a "nationalist?" Certainly. But what kind of nationalist is he? Nationalism was a key to Lebed's rise in politics, and this appeal must be understood to understand a possible future leader of Russia.

Lebed learned to be a politician, adjusting his positions to suit his voters. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his nationalistic views. He started out as an imperialist hard-liner, but then began articulating some of the most important concerns of the Russian public. These concerns were fear of crime and corruption and humiliation and regret about the collapse of the great Russian military. He voiced nostalgia for Russia's great power prestige and a thirst for law and order.

Lebed later learned, however, that over 80 percent of the Russian public did not support using the military in the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union, not

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<sup>323</sup>Robert Marquand, "US Tempers Relief at Yeltsin's Victory With Concern for a Rise in Nationalism," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 July 1996, p. 1.

<sup>324</sup>"A General More to Fear Than Greet," *Moscow Times*, 27 June 1996.

<sup>325</sup>"Lebed: Russians will become extinct if 'suicidal' government policy does not change," Interfax news agency, Moscow, 11 Jan 96, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, January 12, 1996.

even to assist ethnic Russians residing there.<sup>326</sup> The majority of Russians favored an immediate end to the war in Chechnya, and most even favored Chechen independence if that was the price for bringing the Russian troops home.<sup>327</sup> Lebed apparently was trying to respond to these concerns, but at the same time keep nationalism as a distinctive part of his program.

As a result, many of Lebed's statements seemed to contradict each other. As commander of the 14th Army in Moldova, Lebed stated that the Slavic nations of the former Soviet Union -- Russia, Belarus and Ukraine -- will find themselves together again by the end of the century, possibly with Kazakhstan. "I'm deeply convinced of it," he said. "It's like cutting flesh, and it can't go on like this."<sup>328</sup> Statements like that, and the actions of the 14th Army as the perceived defenders of Russians cut adrift by the end of empire, made Lebed a focus for wounded nationalism and right-wing politics in Moscow and in the army itself. Yet two years later, Lebed repeatedly stated that although he believed in unification, he was categorically opposed to the use of force to reunite the old Soviet Union.<sup>329</sup>

Basically, what Lebed said and what he signaled were not the same. Trying to come to power, he often shaded the truth about the past, as he did with his role in violently suppressing ethnic conflict in Azerbaijan and Tbilisi, Georgia. As a politician, he had a steep learning curve when it came to doing what he perceived as right for the Russian people.

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<sup>326</sup> Ariel Cohen, "Czar Lebed?" *Washington Times*, 3 July 1996, p. A17.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Steven Erlanger, "The Russians Have Come! When Will They Go?," *New York Times*, 12 May 1993, p. A4.

<sup>329</sup> "Popular Russian Army General Resigns," National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, 15 June 1995, Transcript # 1629-21, and S. Frederick Starr, "A Russian Politician to Reckon With," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 December 1995, p. 19.



As an example, Lebed called recreating the Soviet empire a hopeless dream.<sup>330</sup> He also sharply criticized Soviet rule in Central Europe, and considered the fall of the Berlin Wall to have been an "act of common sense."<sup>331</sup> It is difficult to determine if Lebed softened his views because he is a realist, or because of his learning process as a politician.

In contradiction, he alarmed Ukraine after claiming in an open letter published in the Black Sea Fleet newspaper that the Ukrainian port city of Sevastopol belongs to Russia.<sup>332</sup> He once called Russia and Ukraine two "organically linked" Slavic states.<sup>333</sup>

Lebed also often called for Russian troops to be stationed in neighboring countries such as Ukraine, demanding action to defend the rights of ethnic Russians living as minorities in ex-Soviet states.<sup>334</sup> But Lebed proclaimed that he will not permit "irresponsible experiments with the army" and suggested the creation of a "nucleus of the mobile armed forces of Russia."<sup>335</sup> He idealizes the Russian Army as the only friend of the nation, and writes at length of the need to revive it from its current disarray brought on by "Russian traitors" inspired and financed by foreign countries eager to keep Russia weak.<sup>336</sup>

In most of Lebed's 1995 autobiography he recounts his military career. During this time he claims he was constantly confronted by difficult problems which baffled others,

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<sup>330</sup>"A General More to Fear Than Greet," *Moscow Times*, 27 June 1996.

<sup>331</sup> S. Frederick Starr, "A Russian Politician to Reckon With," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 December 1995, p. 19.

<sup>332</sup> Carol J. Williams, "Russians Drawn to Both Sides of Maverick Lebed," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>333</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, "The Russian Front-Runner," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 September 1995, p. 14.

<sup>334</sup> Catherine Cote, "Ukraine Welcomes Yeltsin Win, But Worried by Lebed," *Agence France Presse*, 5 July 1996.

<sup>335</sup>"Presidential Candidates Background -- Lebed," TASS, 14 June 1996.

<sup>336</sup> Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "The Struggle for the Kremlin," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 13, (8 August 1996): 30.

but thanks to his skill and ingenuity were always solved.<sup>337</sup> The implication is that he was just the man to solve Russia's current problems. In the book he exhibits his personal biases: he is highly critical of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin and he is even more critical of General Pavel Grachev. The book, in effect his campaign autobiography largely contains personal reflections and reminiscences rather than any focused political or strategic vision.<sup>338</sup>

Lebed's definition of the Russian people is inclusive and not based on ethnic Russians alone. In fact, he sees as the first requirement for healing Russia is a "nationality policy" which will unite the 132 "nations" in the country and citizens of all native religious traditions.<sup>339</sup> At the same time, he sees foreign, particularly Western, influence on culture, religion, and morals as something which is disruptive and must be resisted. Although Lebed had never traveled to the West, he was extremely suspicious of it.

In Lebed's opinion, corruption among government officials and the growth of crime were the main evils in Russia. He proposed to improve the efficiency of state management by considerably reducing the number of public servants. He stated, "It is necessary to break the taxes-officials-bribe-businessman chain."<sup>340</sup> In his view, it was the former high party bureaucrats who simply stole state funds under their control and privatized them for their own gain. Lebed's first priority to break this chain and protect the common citizen was for "every corrupt functionary to be declared a state criminal, starting with the police," whom he called mere "decorations."<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>337</sup>Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Warrior Who Would Rule Russia* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1996), 5.

<sup>339</sup>In his autobiography, Lebed lists the native religious traditions as "Russian Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and many sects." "Sects" is a term usually applied to Protestants. See Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "The Struggle for the Kremlin," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 13, (8 August 1996): 33.

<sup>340</sup>"Presidential Candidates Background -- Lebed," TASS, 14 June 1996.

<sup>341</sup>Interview by Roberto Livi, *Il Messaggero* (Rome), 12 December 1995.

In his electoral policy document, Lebed promised to issue presidential decrees, spearheaded against organized crime, which will make it possible, in his opinion, "to arrest the chieftains of criminal groups using the existing information, and to undermine the crime system."<sup>342</sup>

On "putting things in order in the economy," Lebed suggested a reform of the tax system with a view to making it most clear and easy to understand, as well as reforming the banking sector and making the state play a more active role as a guarantor the investment process.<sup>343</sup>

Because of the way he entered government, Lebed gained the aura of a savior of democracy.<sup>344</sup> This notion is misleading, especially considering his statements that the parliament should be appointed by the president. Anybody who takes this idea literally could be deeply disappointed.

#### **A. FOREIGN POLICY**

"Russia has something to oppose the widening of NATO. We have rockets. They're rusty, but they're rockets." - *Moscow Times*, 2 October 1996

In Russia, the president has far more power than parliament does. Under the Russian constitution, the presidency dwarfs all other political institutions, and it is ultimately the president who determines the country's domestic and foreign policies. If Alexander Lebed is elected president, it will have widespread impact on world affairs - though the impact may not be as severe as many Western analysts fear.

The greatest impact of Lebed as president is likely to be in foreign policy. Despite popular dissatisfaction, market reforms are firmly established in Russia with more than 80 per cent of the workforce employed by at least partially privatized enterprises. Reversing

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<sup>342</sup>"Presidential Candidates Background -- Lebed," *TASS*, 14 June 1996.

<sup>343</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>344</sup>"A General More to Fear Than Greet," *Moscow Times*, 27 June 1996.

this change in ownership would be practically impossible.<sup>345</sup> Lebed will probably moderate his sometimes extreme speech if he becomes president.

Because he prefers to have a buffer zone in Central Europe, Lebed has always objected to NATO enlargement. NATO experts expressed the hope that Lebed's impact on Russia's foreign policy would be insignificant when he was in Yeltsin's administration, since he would be responsible for handling the country's internal problems.<sup>346</sup> But even in that post, Lebed threatened to retaliate against German business interests in Moscow if NATO expanded to Russia's borders.<sup>347</sup>

NATO enlargement was one issue, similar to his strong nationalistic rhetoric, where Lebed softened his one time inflammatory language. He once warned that expanding NATO eastward will bring on a third world war. He was most likely exaggerating, but his real concern was that NATO is, by its nature, a military alliance. The alliance, he believed, was directed at Russia. Lebed's response was that Russia must bank on the leverage of nuclear weapons to keep the West from menacing its borders. A nuclear war would be "a catastrophe for humankind" in which there will be "no winners," But if NATO extends membership to former Soviet allies in Eastern Europe, "Russia will be required to move to the tactics of nuclear deterrence," he said. "The result will be the next abrupt spiral of the arms race."<sup>348</sup> NATO indicated it regarded Lebed as an advocate of great- power ambitions and anti-western policies.<sup>349</sup> Lebed, however, does not refute NATO's right to exist, just the motivation behind its urge to expand.

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<sup>345</sup> Chrystia Freeland, "When the Reds Turn to Brown," *Financial Times* (London), 21 October 1995, p. 8.

<sup>346</sup> M. Podkopayeva, "Russia And Pinochet," *Zavtra*, p. 2, in *Russian Press Digest*, 3 July 1996.

<sup>347</sup> Carol J. Williams, "Russians Drawn to Both Sides of Maverick Lebed," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>348</sup> Joseph Albright and Marcia Kunstel, "Rising Russian General Warns of a New Nuclear Arms Race," *Austin American-Statesman*, 12 November 1995, p. E1.

<sup>349</sup> M. Podkopayeva, "Russia And Pinochet," *Zavtra*, p. 2, in *Russian Press Digest*, 3 July 1996.

After months of dealing with the issue in Moscow, Lebed moderated his views and showed the world he was becoming a politician. On this stance, at least, he was learning the art of political compromise. Instead of being openly critical of NATO enlargement, he in effect challenged the West to reconsider its options: "We will find ways of bringing to the attention of the British and American taxpayers the fact that the creation and improvement of military infrastructure in the Baltic countries will cost them roughly \$100 billion...So if you have enough money and energy to expand, feel free."<sup>350</sup>

Later during his time as national security chief, Lebed flatly added that the prospect of NATO expansion "does not bother me" and that he would find a way to persuade Western taxpayers of the pointlessness of "paying absolutely enormous sums of money to sustain a raised fist against thin air."<sup>351</sup>

Unlike most of his colleagues, Lebed understood that NATO's enlargement was inevitable and that, far from threatening Russia directly, the process will occupy the western alliance for years. It may even cause more problems than it solves, especially on the question of basing nuclear weapons.<sup>352</sup>

Lebed wanted the issue of NATO's enlargement to become a dilemma as soon as possible. He did this by accepting enlargement as a "political" act but without the military consequences of nuclear security. Lebed said the countries of Central Europe may become members of NATO provided that no western nuclear weapons are stationed on their soil and no western military bases and armed forces exist there.<sup>353</sup> This difference would turn NATO, a military pact, into a more political organization. By trying to block deployments

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<sup>350</sup>ITAR-TASS World Service, Moscow, 18 June 1996.

<sup>351</sup>Valery Begishev, "A Union of Two Politicians," *Lesnaia gazeta*, 25 June 1996.

<sup>352</sup>For example, NATO will take on security commitments in Eastern Europe just at the moment when every member is cutting defense expenditures. This will cause many problems at NATO headquarters in Brussels. The Russian foreign ministry also had this view. See "Lebed and NATO - a closer look," *Foreign Report*, 1 August 1996.

<sup>353</sup>"Lebed and NATO - A Closer Look," *Foreign Report*, 1 August 1996.

of nuclear weapons and western forces in Central Europe, Lebed tried to remove NATO's reason for existence.

Lebed could easily disrupt what remains of the constructive US-Russian relationship. His verbal attacks against Madeline Albright in September 1993, whom he accused of intervening in Russian domestic affairs, clearly revealed that he favored a firm policy toward the United States.<sup>354</sup>

He also said that Russia's defense interests would suffer if it ratified the START-2 treaty.<sup>355</sup> According to Lebed, the political situation and balance of power in the world today are quite different from those at the time when the treaty was signed, which is why the ratification must be preceded by a thorough expert assessment.<sup>356</sup>

Some in the US think that Russia needs a strong, authoritarian leader to introduce stable capitalism, but Lebed would be unlikely to have an agreeable foreign policy. Lebed has recently muted his hostility to the West, but his memoirs are contemptuous of Mikhail Gorbachev and his advisers for their policy toward the West. In 1995, he called NATO a drunken vandal in Bosnia and said the IMF loan to Russia was designed to finance the

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<sup>354</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no.3, (Autumn 1995): 417-37.

<sup>355</sup>A major development in reducing the threat of nuclear weapons and controlling the spread of these weapons was the Start I Treaty, signed in 1991. It was the first arms control treaty to reduce deployed strategic weapons and not just limit future deployments. In January of 1993 President Bush and President Yeltsin signed the follow-on Start II agreement, which will eliminate all multiple-warhead ICBMs and reduce the total number of all deployed strategic warheads to between 3,000 and 3,500. This would be a two-thirds reduction in strategic nuclear forces from the height of the Cold War. From Leonard S. Spector, *Tracking Nuclear Proliferation* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 1995), 29.

<sup>356</sup>As of October, 1996, the communist-dominated parliament had not yet passed Start II because it believed that somehow the US would get the upper hand in the agreement, and insisted that Russia never have fewer weapons than the Americans. "Lebed calls Yeltsin's proposal of political nonaggression pact 'unrealistic'," Interfax news agency, Moscow, 30 January 1996, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 31 January 1996.

Chechen war.<sup>357</sup> By all indications, his biggest concern is the decline of the Russian state and military.

On the subject of relations with the US, Lebed noted:

Relations with the USA will continue to play a significant role for Russia. In a whole number of aspects we can and must cooperate fruitfully. This refers first and foremost to problems of nuclear security and the drain of technology for the production of other forms of weapons of mass destruction, to the development and the joint implementation of measures to combat international terrorism and the spread of narcotics. But we need to look at things soberly and realize that there are bound to be differences in the interests of our two countries.<sup>358</sup>

## **B. ECONOMIC POLICY**

We have a market, but it is a market of bribes. Government officials are trading in power. It does not matter to me if these officials are communists or democrats. They are one and the same. I intend to take measures to separate these two components.

*-Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 13 May 1996*

Lebed was conspicuously silent on the subject of economics throughout his rise in politics. In the summer of 1995, the leader of the KRO, Yuri Skokov was quoted in the Russian press as saying that Lebed "does not have enough education" in this field. Beyond ritual attacks on Yeltsin's "shock therapy" and on a privatization process that enriched thousands of totally unworthy Soviet managers, he offered few specifics.

When Lebed blasted the Yeltsin government for its "shock therapy" economic reforms, he asserted, "We have no socialism, no capitalism, no kind of market. It's totally unclear what the government wants." Lebed said the country must find "a third way, a Russian way," to replace Soviet-style socialism and the disorienting market reforms of the

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<sup>357</sup>Jerry Hough, "Lebed: Next Pinochet?," *Moscow Times*, 25 June 1996.

<sup>358</sup>Andrey Surzhanskiy, "Aleksandr Lebed sets out his views and plans in ITAR-TASS interview," *ITAR-TASS* news agency (World Service), Moscow, 27 June 96, from *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 28 June 1996.

Yeltsin era. "Capitalism will never succeed in Russia," he said, adding that a "social explosion" would result if people were allowed to buy and sell land.

The beginning of the reform process, however, has already begun. However suspect the figures, the magnitude of change over the past few years is remarkable. In the economy the non-state sector is now said to employ more than 40% of the workforce; 70% of trade, catering and service industries, and one-third of large and medium enterprises are said to be in private hands.<sup>359</sup> Russians still favor gradual economic reform. Only on the issue of privatizing big enterprises has there been a swing, with a majority now opposing it.<sup>360</sup>

During his campaign Lebed avoided a common economic policy with other members of his Third Force coalition. He declared, "There are three presidential candidates, Lebed, Fedorov and Yavlinsky. Each of them has its own program and the program has an economic chapter. I am not going to poach on anyone's ideas. I see no point."<sup>361</sup>

The basic components of Lebed's vague economic policy were: self-reliance, the elimination of economic dependence, and encouragement of Russian industry and entrepreneurialism. Lebed envisioned a strong state sector, active restructuring of the economy in the direction of developing science-intensive areas of production and the reduction of raw material exports.<sup>362</sup> Some analysts have described this simply as

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<sup>359</sup>Report by Russian Ministry of Economics, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 5 March 1994.

<sup>360</sup> Jerry Hough, "Russians Are Grumpy, and the West Is Involved," *International Herald Tribune*, February 13, 1996.

<sup>361</sup> "Press Conference With Alexander Lebed," *Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast*, 13 May 1996.

<sup>362</sup> "Pravda Endorses Congress of Russian Communities," *Pravda*, Moscow, 11 November 1995, p. 4, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 20 November 1995.



economic patriotism. Due to his inexperience with the subject, Lebed's views on economic policy never had the chance to mature during the election campaign.<sup>363</sup>

Initially, Lebed maintained that Russia's move toward capitalism turned "the Motherland into a garbage pit for colonial powers," but later accepted the basics of capitalism. Lebed made his most direct remarks about his economic policy during a May, 1996 press conference. The state, he maintained, has a strong position in a market economy, but should not interfere with free trade:

In the state apparatus government officials fulfilled orders, they implemented the law, they saw to it that all the other citizens in the state observed the law. In theory, government officials should not meddle in the affairs of the market. There is the market in which everything is determined by the price, by supply and demand, by trade. Those who engage in trade do not meddle in affairs of state administration.<sup>364</sup>

At the same press conference, Lebed addressed the problems of illegal and unfair privatization:

Today we have a *nomenklatura* monster. You can endlessly object to me and say that we have privatized and corporatized enterprises. But where are all these plant directors, these bankers moving over to? They are moving over into the category of civil servants. Then he has the right to decide to grant or to deny a credit, to delay repayment of a debt, to grant premises or not, it is the civil servant who adopts decisions on the basis of what he is promised or given. That isn't right. This is a monster. Until we have killed that monster nothing good will come out of our efforts and we will eke out a meager existence. There is no alternative.<sup>365</sup>

Lebed's economic rhetoric during the Russian presidential election was very different from that of other candidates. He was not the politician that tended to make elaborate promises to attract votes, insisting, "I am not going to promise anything to

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<sup>363</sup>Peter J. Stavakis, testimony before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, 27 February 1996.

<sup>364</sup>"Press Conference With Alexander Lebed," *Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast*, 13 May 1996.

<sup>365</sup>*Ibid.*

anybody, I do not play these games." Lebed always tried to formulate even the most complicated problems in a clear and understandable way: "I have long come to realize that free cheese can be found only in a mouse trap...I suggest that we all work, work for our own benefit. I shall give you a free hand. I shall give you protection, and we shall work together. This is what I call proper order in the country."<sup>366</sup> Such statements, however, added to his credibility in the eyes of voters who were disheartened with unfulfilled promises. He attacked statism and social democracy, and insisted "Nomenklatura capitalism is nothing but chaos."<sup>367</sup>

After joining Yeltsin's administration, Lebed issued a 22-page policy program entitled "A New Approach to the Problems of National Security," which addressed economic issues. Among other things, he said he would boost the state's role in the economy and reshape reform policies to benefit the defense and agriculture industries. He had a firm belief that "the main threat to national security is the lack of an economic strategy and rational state regulation of the economy."<sup>368</sup>

The document he issued outlined a series of economic initiatives designed to increase national security, including measures to stem capital flight, more state control of agriculture and an anti-corruption and tax evasion task force.<sup>369</sup> On the one hand, Lebed was opposed to economic monetarism and the policy aimed at eliminating the budget deficit. On the other hand, he supported the stepping up of agricultural reforms but insisted on constant state control of the processes of land use.

While his economic policy remained vague and unfocused, Lebed was certain he could not return to the Soviet system of a centrally planned economy. This system failed

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<sup>366</sup>"Presidential Candidates Background -- Lebed," *TASS*, 14 June 1996.

<sup>367</sup>Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>368</sup>"Grab for power: While Yeltsin recovers from a cold, third-place presidential finisher Alexander Lebed makes ambitions known," *Calgary Herald*, 3 July 1996, p. A5.

<sup>369</sup>Sergey Lukianov, "Lebed Seeks Economic Clout," *Moscow Times*, 28 June 1996.

miserably and attempts to return to a central economy will collapse immediately. Lebed certainly understood that the painful economic changes must continue. He told the newspaper *Trud*, "Without a market and private property, people work much worse."<sup>370</sup> The economic debate in Russia is not about the ultimate goal of "capitalism Russian Style."<sup>371</sup> Even if Lebed becomes president, the debate is about how fast and in what way Russians will achieve capitalism.

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<sup>370</sup>Gwynne Dyer, "A Good Day in Russia: Yeltsin's Allies Will Give Country Stability at the Centre," *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 July 1996, p. B2.

<sup>371</sup>Philip Hanson, "The Future of Russian Economic Reform," *Survival* 36, no. 3, pp. 28-45.

## VI. FOREVER A SOLDIER: LEBED EXPOSED

### A. THE APPEAL OF LEBED

With his former boxer's battered face, and a voice like artillery fire, Lebed stood out in Russian politics. It might appear that Lebed brought something new to the Russian political landscape. He was the honest warrior against the powerful and corrupt in Moscow. Russians seemed romantically drawn to the image of a defiant man on a white horse who could solve their problems. If anything about his views and policies were new, however, it was that they were a new mix of traditional political policies that have existed for centuries.

One of the reasons for Lebed's popularity was that he radiated personal authority, sincerity and openness that Russians generally appreciate. Also, most Russians saw Lebed as a man who sacrificed his military career to save a people. Lebed was wronged by the existing authority and that made him extremely well liked. His own career was a chronicle of unrewarded sacrifice and betrayal by those he served.<sup>372</sup>

What was the source of this battle-hardened warriors appeal? Most of all, Lebed skillfully tapped into two major themes in contemporary Russian politics -- wounded national pride and the law-and-order crusade. This simple message convinced millions of voters that he should be their next leader.<sup>373</sup> But taking a closer look, one can see that Lebed appealed to more than just nationalism and the fight against corruption. He appealed to Russians who shared all the values which he embodies. Together, history has shown that the first two values are based firmly in Russian culture; the others are more contemporary in origin for a Russian political leader. The values are: 1)sovereign rule,

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<sup>372</sup>Carol J. Williams, "Russians Drawn to Both Sides of Maverick Lebed," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>373</sup>Ariel Cohen, "General Alexander Lebed: Russia's Rising Political Star," *Heritage Foundation Reports*, 26 September 1995, p. 1.

2)strong military power, 3)contemporary Russian nationalism, and 4) integrity and the law-and-order crusade.

### 1. Sovereign Rule

About the presidency, I think it is fine. In Russia we had a czar, and then he was replaced by the general secretary. Now we have a president. It is in our tradition, and all one and the same. -*Moscow Times*, 4 July 1996

The first reason for Lebed's popularity was his belief of strong, autocratic--or sovereign-- rule. Lebed often called for stronger state power along with stronger defense of Russian people and culture. The appeal was supported by Russian history, where the sovereign ruler has always existed. That was true under the czars, and it was true under the communists. In the Soviet Union the sovereign was the communist party, and it claimed a monopoly on power. The party was even more centralized than the czarist administration, and it too aspired to control the czar's vast empire.<sup>374</sup> Indeed, it remained formally true until the spring of 1990, when Article 6 of the Brezhnev Constitution was repealed and the communist party lost its constitutional hold on power. There is very little sense, in the tradition of Russian political thought or in the practice of Russian governments throughout the ages, that political authority needs to be constrained by anything other than its own sense of what is good or bad for the country or for itself.<sup>375</sup>

Russian history has shown that power is identified overwhelmingly with one individual. Under the constitution, if the President dies or if he suffers from permanent incapacity due to the condition of his health, the Prime Minister takes over as acting

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<sup>374</sup>The communist party was at least as centralized as the czarist government in theory, and more so in practice, owing to the party's origin in conspiratorial politics and to such technical factors as improved communications and transportation. Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1963, pp.39-48, quoted in Rebecca V. Strode and Colin S. Gray, "The Imperial Dimension of Soviet Military Power," *Problems of Communism* (Nov-Dec 1981): 7.

<sup>375</sup> Rodric Braithwaite, "Russian Realities and Western Policy," *Survival* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): pp. 11-27.

president and elections are held within three months. That means the whole political direction could change rapidly.

The new Russian President has powers that are only slightly less restricted than Czar Nicholas I in the 1850s. The moment he is elected he dismisses the entire government and appoints a new one. He has full responsibility for defense and foreign policy and in some cases can dissolve parliament and rule by decree.<sup>376</sup>

So far the Russian presidency has not evolved far from the Russian autocratic tradition where the ruler continues to rule regardless of the fate of his administration. Russia is still, in the words of Vitaly Tretyakov, the editor of one of Moscow's best daily newspapers, "A mixture of the authority of the Party apparatus and the monarch's court."<sup>377</sup>

Lebed repeatedly demanded that the president needs a strong, authoritarian hand. Throughout his rise in politics, he campaigned for a return to more sovereign rule: "This country has been without stern, sails and wind, and it needs someone at the helm." He believed that a more sovereign ruler is needed, but that democracy is inevitable. "We are doomed to live in an authoritarian state until genuine democracy, which should not be confused with anarchy, can be set up." In Russia, where there is no tradition of civil society or the rule of law, the process of building a democratic modern state is bound to take many years and undergo many false starts.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup>A referendum on a new constitution in December 1993 secured Yeltsin himself these powers of a democratically elected czar, which he won only by a narrow margin. The text was decided after the President defeated his parliamentary opposition with tanks on the streets of Moscow two months before. In that confrontation, one of Yeltsin's main opponents, his running-mate from 1991, Aleksandr Rutskoi, ended up in jail and the post of vice-president was abolished. See Thomas de Waal "Autocratic Rule Carries Risk of Political Chaos," *Times* (London), 4 July 1996.

<sup>377</sup>Vitaly Tretyakov, *Nezavisimayagazeta*, 25 December 1993, quoted in Victor Yasmann, *RFE/RL Research Report*, 11 February, 1994, p. 14.

<sup>378</sup>Rodric Braithwaite, "Russian Realities and Western Policy," *Survival* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): pp. 11-27.

Lebed's message appealed to millions of common Russians. In a 1996 opinion poll, 72 percent of the respondents favored "order" and only 9 percent "democracy."<sup>379</sup> Weary of corruption, organized crime and fallen pride, voters said they wanted strong leadership and a new face - with a touch of the iron-fisted authority of old.<sup>380</sup>

Historian Yuri Afanasyev insisted that there is an authoritarian legacy in Russia that goes to "the essential nature of the Russian people. The double bondage of [the czarist and communist] totalitarian heritage is most evident in the spiritual life of contemporary Russia."<sup>381</sup> Lebed's appeal, it seems, is part of that spiritual life. The main reason the Russian people have not escaped totalitarian systems, before or since 1917, has been the lack of a civil society. The state monopolized every activity, and no separate society existed apart from the state's control.<sup>382</sup> Lebed has even described the Yeltsin regime as a democracy which is "totalitarian in essence"<sup>383</sup> Lebed believed that Russia needed a president who will be a "master of his country," because a master would not allow 42 per cent of the population to live below the poverty line.<sup>384</sup>

In his memoir, Lebed emphatically portrayed himself as a man of decisive and authoritarian action. He was forthright in his views of democracy, and for years he praised

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<sup>379</sup> Andrei Papushin, "Word Spoken By Lebed," *Kuranty*, p. 4, in *Russian Press Digest*, 9 July 1996.

<sup>380</sup> "Russia Has Own 'Colin Powell,' Ex-Soviet General Has An Eye On Presidency," *Chicago Tribune*, New York Times News Service, Moscow, 15 October 1995, p. 14.

<sup>381</sup> Yuri N. Afanasyev, "Russian Reform Is Dead," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2, (March/April 1994): 22.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> "Gen Aleksandr Lebed Confident of Winning Presidential Election," Russian Television Network, Moscow, 23 February 1996 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 26 February 1996.

<sup>384</sup> "Lebed Says Ready to Withdraw Presidential Candidacy, Calls for 'National Pragmatism'," Interfax news agency, Moscow, 24 January 1996 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 25 January 1996.

General Augusto Pinochet of Chile. In April 1996, he told the party convention nominating him that the legislature should be appointed by the president, not elected. His campaign ads described Yeltsin as a "worthy czar" but in decline, and said that "Czar Lebed," whose powers "are on the upswing," is the only alternative to Yeltsin.<sup>385</sup>

Though his personality is clearly authoritarian, he also professes to be an enemy of big government. He not only opposed Communist Party control of the Army, but also of the country as a whole. He defended the Army's actions in brutally suppressing a peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi, Georgia in April 1989, but condemned the political leadership for trying to use the Army for internal security. He had almost a mystical concept of the nature and uniqueness of the Russian people, but did not postulate a mission for them of saving the world - a claim that philosophical imperialists such as Dostoevsky and the pan-Slav writer Nikolai Danilevsky frequently made.<sup>386</sup>

Even with very little exposure to the West, Lebed's political intuition saw that Russia is slowly and painfully becoming a democracy. He wants to be that democracy's elected czar.<sup>387</sup> But the idea that Russia needs a determined and clear-sighted president should not be confused with the notion that such a man must be unreasoning. Modernization by tyranny is no more likely to work today than it did when Stalin tried it half a century ago.<sup>388</sup> Lebed wrote in his autobiography, "Our Russian state is just being born. We must purge it of the dirt of previous rulers. We must make it humane."<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>385</sup>Jerry Hough, "Lebed: Next Pinochet?," *Moscow Times*, 25 June 1996.

<sup>386</sup>Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "The Struggle for the Kremlin," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 13, (8 August 1996): 33.

<sup>387</sup>Ariel Cohen, "Czar Lebed?" *Washington Times*, 3 July 1996, p. A17.

<sup>388</sup>"General Uncertainty," *Economist* (London), 29 June 1996, p. 16.

<sup>389</sup>Sergei Shargorodsky, "Ex-General a Threat or Boon to Russia's Democracy?" *Associated Press*, 22 June 1996.



## 2. Strong Military

"This is how the world is organized: It was based, it is based and it will be based on force." - *Vancouver Sun*, 10 November 1995

The second reason for Lebed's extensive popularity among the Russian electorate was his promise to restore the weak and depleted Russian military. As an army general, he consistently maintained that the military situation was disastrous. He was one of the most severe critics of the state of the Russian Army, which he found lamentable and close to catastrophe.<sup>390</sup>

Lebed described Russia's once-great military as a dwindling corps of "starving soldiers" with no international respect. Lamenting on the growing rate of draft evasion, he said, "A miserable situation has emerged in which we live in a country of 150 million, but we can't even make an army of 500,000 soldiers." As chairman of the Security Council, Lebed planned to implement vigorous military reform, abolishing the draft and creating an all-volunteer, professional Army.

Early in his political career, Lebed moved on his own to mobilize the military vote by creating a military-patriotic lobby, Honor and Motherland. The movement aimed to take advantage of discontent in the officers corps over the lack of housing and the low stature of the army in post-Soviet Russia.

In Russia and the Soviet Union, military and geopolitical factors always took precedence over economic considerations.<sup>391</sup> Power came to be seen as the addition of

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<sup>390</sup>Lebed charged that the Russian Army was in deplorable condition and that assertions by the military leadership to the contrary had no basis in reality. He also said that defense-related legislation passed in Russia was useless because its provisions were not enforced. In addition, he also criticized the parliament for laws that drastically reduced the army's available conscript pool; he claimed that many units withdrawn from abroad were in disarray and not battle-worthy. He also called for Russia to export more arms. See *Pravda*, 24 August 1994. Quoted from Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no.3, (Autumn 1995): 417-37.

<sup>391</sup>Hannes Adomeit, "Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Reality," *International Affairs* 71, no.1, (1995): 38.

quantitative indicators, such as size of population, the volume of industrial output, the geographical expanse of empire and the number of divisions, tanks, aircraft, missiles and nuclear warheads. Being equal meant having just as many divisions and arms as all other potential adversaries combined. Lebed's military talk impressed the millions of Russians who longed for the superpower days. Russians have the idea that military power can be transformed into political influence and that growing arsenals translated into enhanced status, prestige and power in international affairs.<sup>392</sup>

In addition to its utility for legitimacy, a powerful military force has a strong psychological effect on other states and on the Russian people themselves. Military power demands international esteem and respect - which might not have been accorded to the Soviet regime or the Russian government on the basis of its performance in other areas of international competition.<sup>393</sup>

Lebed repeatedly vowed to rebuild and expand the army. He once said, "The world stands on power, and we have become toothless." He promised to restore respect for Russia in the world. He told the newspaper *Trud* that Russia should "have troops that would scare any aggressor off." To restore the Russian army, Lebed said he would sharply reduce the number of conventional ground force divisions because most were understaffed and not ready for battle. He suggested that Russia should have "10 times fewer" divisions, and "a small, mobile army under the protection of the nuclear shield."<sup>394</sup> Lebed believed that Russia would not have to be involved in regional conflicts with great

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<sup>392</sup>Report of the European Security Study (ESECS), "The Political Rationale of Soviet Military Capabilities and Doctrine," *Strengthening Conventional Deterrence in Europe: Proposals for the 1980s*, (London: Macmillan, 1983), 67-104.

<sup>393</sup>Rebecca V. Strode and Colin S. Gray, "The Imperial Dimension of Soviet Military Power," *Problems of Communism* (Nov-Dec 1981): 11.

<sup>394</sup>Joseph Albright and Marcia Kunstel, "Rising Russian General Warns of a New Nuclear Arms Race," *Austin American-Statesman*, 12 November 1995, p. E1.

military powers before 1999, and for that period the strength of the armed forces personnel could be cut down to 1.2 million.<sup>395</sup>

He said this drawdown, however, was not a result of the changed global situation, but "a result of our impotence." Russia does not have enough strength, including armed force, to defend its national interests. "We follow in the wake of the policy of others. This cannot last infinitely," he once said. In his view, as soon as Russia becomes independent politically and economically, it will have to defend its national interests outside its territory.<sup>396</sup> Although the risk that international problems will arise in Russia's Near Abroad will grow with the growth of Russia's might, influence and prestige in the world. Russia does need an army capable of defending its borders, and it needs a minimal numerical strength required for maintaining a sufficient level of combat readiness.

Lebed's military appeal was often connected to his anti-NATO remarks. He was suspicious of cooperation with the West and especially NATO. "If Russia and NATO cooperate, who are they going to be against?" he asked during an interview. "There used to be two systems, two military blocs. One system collapsed. Its military bloc collapsed. And the other part remains in perfect operating order. That beautiful NATO bloc was first aimed at the Soviet Union, and it would be a pity to abandon it. So, now it is re-aimed at Russia." <sup>397</sup>

He once believed that Russia, threatened by NATO, may be forced to set up an alliance of its own. "It will make Russia denounce previous agreements and turn to NATO tactics of nuclear deterrence," he said. "And that will eventually entail another arms race and, at best, another Cold War."<sup>398</sup> Lebed described Russia as a disease that the rest of the

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<sup>395</sup>"Where Is The Limit Of Reasonable Reduction Of The Army?," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, p1, in *Russian Press Digest*, January 13, 1996.

<sup>396</sup>Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> "The Leading Contenders Who Would Take Charge In Moscow," *Observer*, 29 October 1995, p. 21.

<sup>398</sup>David Hoffman, "Maverick General Upstages Yeltsin; Top Presidential Candidate Promises to Restore Order," *Washington Post*, 21 October 1995, p. A01.

world ignores at its peril. He once said, "Russia must be loved, but not because you want to. Russia is like gangrene on the leg. If you don't take measures against it, it will infect the whole leg."

Lebed's point is well taken. Not only does Moscow need a reliable and disciplined Russian Army, so too does the rest of the world. It was easy to imagine during Lebed's rise in politics a charismatic general either launching a coup or setting himself up as a dissident local warlord. Had he been willing, Lebed could have done so in Moldova.<sup>399</sup> When the army's morale and discipline are at their lowest, then it only takes a small number of determined and disciplined fighters to achieve victory. This was something the Bolsheviks realized when they seized power in 1917.

Even after his appointment to the Yeltsin administration, Lebed accused the government of allowing the military to deteriorate to the point of mutiny. He in effect accused the prime minister and other top aides of not doing their jobs.<sup>400</sup> His sensational comments also kept him in the public eye and strengthened his ties with the Russian military, which remained an important constituency in his struggle for power.

### **3. Wounded National Pride: Lebed's Use Of Contemporary Russian Nationalism**

"Lebed stole my act and he stole my votes. I should take him to court."

- Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, *New Yorker*, 22 July 1996

The third reason for Lebed's popularity was his use of contemporary Russian nationalism. Lebed gained strength from the increasing nationalistic sentiment in Russia and the sense that national pride was disheartened. He appealed to this sentiment in his campaign speeches and in his earliest interviews with the media. In 1994, he alleged that "The West is attempting to turn Russia into a cheap supplier of raw materials, a reservoir

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<sup>399</sup>Mark Galeotti, "Russia's Rotten Army," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 8, no. 3 (1 March 1996): 99.

<sup>400</sup>"Lebed Attacks Power Transfer, Says Yeltsin Should Step Down During Illness," *New York Times*, 29 September 1996, A2.

of free labor, and a huge hazardous waste dump for the industrial world."<sup>401</sup> Because "Everybody is wiping their feet on Russia...Russia has to show her teeth."<sup>402</sup> Lebed's popularity followed in the wake of ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the relative success of his Liberal Democratic Party in the 1993 parliamentary elections.

Zhirinovskiy's victory may have led to the rise of Lebed and other nationalistic candidates, and might have been the influence for the Russian government to pay closer attention to the issue of nationalism and take more nationalistic positions. During 1995, Russia's government began to shift to a more nationalist and anti-western stance, objecting to NATO air strikes in Bosnia, opposing the eastward expansion of the NATO alliance and pledging to fund the construction of a nuclear reactor in Cuba.

Using the two national themes, Russian "greatness" and protection of Russians abroad, Lebed gained immense political support. Like most Russians and Europeans, Lebed and his party did not like the label "nationalist," or even the word "national."<sup>403</sup> His nationalist rhetoric was sharp, but his views were more sensible than the bizarre threats of Zhirinovskiy. Lebed's brand of mainstream Russian nationalism, while appealing openly to the emotions, was more moderate than that of Zhirinovskiy and other figures on the Russian right. Unlike them, he refused to promise to restore the Soviet Union or to turn Russia back into a state for Orthodox Christians.

Also unlike many other hard-line candidates, Lebed appealed to the idea that all sorts of peoples can be called Russian. This idea, which was different than the sharp nationalism of Zhirinovskiy, had new appeal in the wake of the disastrous war in Chechnya.

Lebed quickly became a more convincing figurehead of nationalism than the clowning Zhirinovskiy, although some of his statements were just as bizarre and

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<sup>401</sup>Lyudmila Felixova, "Dolzhna pritupit'sia bol'," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 6 September 1994, p. 1.

<sup>402</sup>Alexander Mukomolov, "Alexander Lebed: '14 Armiya v Pridnestrovye-chistaya politika,'" *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 27 October 1994, p. 1.

<sup>403</sup>Victoria Clark, "Russians Soften to Mr. Iron Fist," *Observer*, 1 October 1995, p. 23.

unfounded. Lebed accused foreign advertising companies and multinationals of using psychological methods to warp Russians' minds. He also lashed out at the influx of foreign foods into Russia's market since the 1991 Soviet collapse, saying it "reached a level of food aggression."<sup>404</sup> Lebed became popular with nationalists, but apparently went too far when he denounced the proliferation of American evangelist sects in Russia. His description of Mormons as "mold and scum" provoked a swift protest from Washington.<sup>405</sup>

Although Lebed was too realistic to advocate the restoration of the Soviet Union, he did call for the reintroduction of Soviet-era visa restrictions for foreigners and controls on their freedom to travel around the country. He suggested that foreign countries should be categorized "in terms of their friendliness" to Russia and looked more to the East than to the West for inspiration, emphasizing the need for building closer ties with China.<sup>406</sup> Lebed also believed that Russian intelligence is not doing enough abroad, and should step up its activities.

*a. Background*

Lebed's nationalism blended in some new elements, but using nationalism for political gain is certainly well known. Since the time of Napoleon, the idea of the "nation" and the driving force of "nationalism" have dominated the making and wielding of political, economic, and military power in every kind of society and under every kind of ideological banner.<sup>407</sup> In its most basic form, nationalism is a movement devoted to the interests of one's own nation, based upon the folk idioms, history, aspirations and culture.<sup>408</sup> Nationalism is therefore strongly tied to the idea of nationhood, whose standard elements are a shared past and a shared common will.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>404</sup>"Grab for power: While Yeltsin recovers from a cold, third-place presidential finisher Alexander Lebed makes ambitions known," *Calgary Herald*, 3 July 1996, p. A5.

<sup>405</sup>"Beware Lebed the Bear," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

<sup>406</sup>Ibid.

<sup>407</sup>Harold R. Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1975) 173.

<sup>408</sup>Stein, ed., *The Random House College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1980) 886.

Post-Soviet Russia is a perfect example of a nation struggling to create a sense of common identity among the people within its borders. For this reason, Lebed's ability to stir a sense of common Russian identity - what it means to be "Russian" - might well have a lasting effect on Russian politics.

**b. Today's Russia**

Political candidates appealing to Russian nationalism were increasing in popularity throughout Russia in 1994 and 1995. Their appeal was due largely to nostalgia for a time when Russia was a superpower, when the gaps between rich and poor were less visible and crime was little known. They promised law and order, cheap housing, free health care and education, a crackdown on "unearned" income and the return of "illegally" privatized property. A letter in the pro-Communist newspaper *Sovietskaya Rossiya* summed up the nationalist argument: "State property has mostly fallen into the hands of thieves, cheats and other scum. We are faced with unemployment and collapse." Lebed was one of the many candidates that pledged a return to honor and dignity.

There are two common characteristics of contemporary Russian nationalism.<sup>410</sup> The first is a sense of Russian "greatness" and the right and responsibility to exercise Russian leadership within the Commonwealth of Independent States. The second characteristic is a desire to protect and promote the interests of citizens not only within the Russian Federation but Russian Federation citizens living outside Russia (maybe with dual citizenship) and other ethnic Russians or even Russian-speaking populations outside Russia.

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<sup>409</sup>Harold R. Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1975), 174.

<sup>410</sup>For a discussion of this definition, see James W. Morrison, *Vladimir Zhirinovskiy: An Assessment of a Russian Ultra-Nationalist* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1994) p38, and William D. Jackson, "Russian After the Crisis. Imperial Temptations: Ethnicity Abroad," *Orbis* 38, no.1, (Winter 1994): 16.

In a widely accepted definition, John Dunlop concentrates on the spectrum of Russian nationalist thought. He identifies the liberal-nationalist, the "centrists," the "National Bolsheviks," and the neo-Stalinists. See Stephen K. Carter, *Russian Nationalism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 124.

Other less significant features of new Russian nationalism are a sense of pan-Slavism, and even less significant, a connection to the Orthodox Church. Evidence of this was the Russian attitude of support toward Serbs in Bosnia.<sup>411</sup>

c. *Russian "Greatness"*

Lebed emerged during a national crisis. Russia was a lost empire, where everything was lost that the czars and Stalin had built. Like Weimar Germany, Russia experienced a national humiliation by losing its superpower status. It was gripped by an economic crisis, compounded by a rupture in its social fabric.<sup>412</sup> Also like Weimar Germany, Russia sustained bloody political upheavals, most notably the dissolution of the Soviets, in the fall of 1993, and the seemingly endless war in Chechnya.

Under these conditions, there is usually no other way to unite a country's loyal forces than to appeal to patriotic feelings. Russians believe they are a great-power nation. The call for the restoration of Russia's past greatness, therefore, was a natural and almost expected claim. Many other candidates also appealed to national feelings, but all of them tended to put ideological belief first and Russia second.<sup>413</sup>

Historically, the Russian empire was created even before the Russian nation was created, or at least along with it. Russians have never lived in a state that was anything but an empire.<sup>414</sup> Russians found it difficult to distinguish between "Russia proper," that is, their national homeland, and their czar's imperial possessions that were

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<sup>411</sup> Moscow remained adamantly opposed to lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia and to the adoption of military measures against the Bosnian Serbs, above all NATO air strikes on Serb gun positions. See Yuri N. Afanasyev, "Russian Reform Is Dead," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2, (March/April 1994): 46.

<sup>412</sup> Gregory Freidin, "Post-Soviet Politics; Does the Communists' Rise Augur a 'Weimar' Russia?," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 January 1996, sec. Opinion, p. 1.

<sup>413</sup> "Pravda Endorses Congress of Russian Communities," *Pravda*, Moscow, 11 November 1995, p. 4, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 20 November 1995.

<sup>414</sup> Sergei Maksudov and William Taubman, "Russian-Soviet Nationality Policy and Foreign Policy: A Historical Overview of the Linkage Between Them," *The Rise of Nations* p18.



not Russian in the same sense.<sup>415</sup> This confusion, in turn, made the Russians more suspicious of their subject nationalities and their demand, which they treated as a threat to the state's integrity.<sup>416</sup>

In the Soviet Union and the Russian Republic ethnic feeling was intensified by deliberate policies that combined the ethnic and political divisions in the federal structure of the state.<sup>417</sup> Nationalism grew by frequently promoting national cultures and languages. Ethnic minorities received preferential treatment within their own autonomous republics - including ethnic quotas in regional administrations and in higher education.

During the parliamentary and presidential campaigns, Lebed, however, remained virtually the only candidate in the nationalist field who did not use ethnicity as a basis of Russian nationalism.<sup>418</sup> He was not what most scholars in the West would call an "ethnic nationalist." He had the imperial consciousness of the "greatness" of Russia, and that ethnic differences did not matter as long as those peoples were within the "Russian empire." This consciousness was actually a pre-nationalist idea and reflects the history of Russia as an empire but not the history of Russia as a nation or state.

Lebed gained popularity in his call for a return to the "greatness" of Russia, and even Yeltsin thought he could become a supporter of this form of nationalism. Yeltsin said, "Russia was and continues to be a great world power"<sup>419</sup> that

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<sup>415</sup> Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx Versus Friedrich List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 206.

<sup>416</sup> Richard Pipes, "Introduction: The Nationality Problem," in *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*, ed. Zev Katz (New York: Free Press; London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 1, from Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx Versus Friedrich List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 206.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Peter J. Stavrakis, testimony before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, 27 February 1996.

<sup>419</sup> Yeltsin in a speech to the collegium of the defense ministry, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 25 November 1992.

should rid itself of the "anti-imperialist syndrome" and not "shy away from defending our own interests," even when such action would be criticized as "imperialist."<sup>420</sup>

While Lebed admired Chilean military dictator General Augusto Pinochet for turning the Chilean economy around, and talked about the need for a strong leader, he still insisted he would work within the confines of the constitution. Although Lebed shared the hard-liners' preoccupation with Russia's lost power, he was not one of the neo-Imperialists that advocated marching into Kazakhstan. He once called ultra-nationalist Zhirinovskiy a dangerous fanatic.<sup>421</sup>

As president, Lebed claims he would cut the Army's size and make it more professional, thus abandoning the cherished Soviet ideal of a mass army. Lebed dreamed of building a voluntary confederation by means of which Moscow would gradually reestablish its regional leadership.<sup>422</sup> While this, too, presents serious problems to the sovereignty of the new states, especially Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, it did not differ greatly from the program advocated by Russian Nobel laureate Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn and what was already being pursued by the Yeltsin government.

Although Solzhenitsyn is a bitter opponent of communism, his distaste for Western culture was widely shared by leaders like Lebed and helped to explain rapidly growing xenophobia and anti-Americanism in contemporary Russian society. This resentment cannot be explained in purely rational terms; it is visceral, based less on what the outside world does than what it is and represents.<sup>423</sup> Much of Russian society thirsts for a social cohesiveness and national sense of purpose that are threatened by the

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<sup>420</sup>Yeltsin in an address to foreign ministry officials, Interfax (Moscow), 28 October 1992.

<sup>421</sup>"Popular Russian Army General Resigns," National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, 15 June 1995, Transcript # 1629-12.

<sup>422</sup>S. Frederick Starr, "A Russian Politician to Reckon With," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 15, 1995, p19.

<sup>423</sup>Steven Merrit, "The Pretenders Waiting for Yeltsin to Depart," *Times Union* (Albany, NY), 24 November 1995, p. A17.

destruction of modern culture. As a politician reaching for the reins of power, Lebed was quick to take advantage of the people's yearning.

*d. Protection of Russians Abroad*

Because the Russian empire was landlocked, about 25 million Russians now live outside Russia in parts of the former Soviet and czarist empire - what they now call the Near Abroad. Nearly half of these people live in Ukraine. Russians comprise more than half the population of Belarus, and a substantial part of the population of Latvia and Estonia.<sup>424</sup> The northern part of Kazakhstan is mostly populated by a compact bloc of Russians, who live much closer to the Russian towns of Siberia than to the capital of Kazakhstan.<sup>425</sup>

A combination of political and economic circumstances created significant incentives for governments in the newly independent republics to pursue nationalistic policies that redistributed benefits and opportunities to their own indigenous nationals.<sup>426</sup> These policies have created both anxieties and hardships for Russians and other minorities. In addition, open hostility toward ethnic Russians increased in a number of republics.<sup>427</sup>

Lebed insisted that Russia was not doing enough to protect the Russians living in the other republics, and this issue became a recurring topic of campaign speeches and interviews. Although he was categorically opposed to the use of force to unite ethnic Russians, he supported the use of force to protect them. He once said Russia should solve the problem of ethnic Russians living "outside the borders of their historic homeland" with "any available means, including military." He even suggested turning off the gas supplies

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<sup>424</sup>Rodric Braithwaite, "Russian Realities and Western Policy," *Survival* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): pp. 11-27.

<sup>425</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>426</sup>William D. Jackson, "Russian After the Crisis. Imperial Temptations: Ethnic Abroad," *Orbis* 38, no.1 (Winter 1994): 16.

<sup>427</sup>*Ibid.*

of new states to quickly make them understand how independent they really were. In June, 1995, Lebed made a startling statement concerning the newly independent states:

People must be given the opportunity of feeling the burden of sovereignty. If you want to be happy--be happy. Live. But if I sell you something, it will be at world prices. And if you are unable to pay, I will turn off the faucet. If such a policy were to be implemented, all these movements towards sovereignty and independence would be sharply curtailed. Sit there without gas, without oil, without coal, without timber. While I explain to you in smooth Russian that you will sit out the rest of the century right where you are. You have sovereignty to warm yourself, and independence to eat.<sup>428</sup>

Cynical statements like this contradicted his statements opposing the restoration of the Russian Empire.

In his autobiography, Lebed explains his views on "how we arrived at where we are." Unlike other popular nationalists, Lebed said years of incompetent, corrupt leadership, not evil foreign conspiracies, made Russia weak. He said, "I want Russia to be strong within its present borders," denying that if he were president he would attempt to re-establish the Russian empire. But a Russia under Lebed would still view the territory of the former Soviet Union as its sphere of interest. He said, "Until we solve the problem of our 25 million Russians [living in former Soviet republics] in a civilized way, we will need bases in foreign countries."

It must be remembered that the often-cited figure of 25 million ethnic Russians is from the Soviet census of 1989. The government spent decades directing a campaign of Russification of the many non-Russian nations it controlled. Many "ethnic Russians" are merely Russian-speakers.<sup>429</sup> Not surprisingly, the "25 million" figure is used widely by Russian politicians because it helps legitimize interference in the Near Abroad.

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<sup>428</sup> "I Was Not Just Brought Into Politics, I Was Driven In," FBIS-UMA-95-023, 7 June 1995, p.9.

<sup>429</sup> Petro Matiaszek, "How Moscow Plays the 'Ethnic Russian' Card," *New York Times*, 4 April 1996, p. A10.

The nationalism of Russian greatness and protecting Russians abroad was a prominent theme in all platforms in the 1996 elections. All candidates assured the public that they would defend Russian national culture and Russian national interests, usually with the implication that Yeltsin's economic reforms had been carried out too much the way the West wanted it and too little regard for the ordinary Russians. Lebed also combined his assertive nationalism with strong support for protecting entrepreneurs, lowering taxes, and reducing the bureaucracy.<sup>430</sup> Interestingly, he apparently did not know that all these positions are closer to British and American conservative principles than to the traditional Russian attitudes he said he was defending.

#### **4. Integrity and the Law and Order Crusade**

"Eleven million people believed I can impose order, and I take on myself that difficult responsibility." - *International Herald Tribune*, 3 July 1996

Finally, if there is one key feature that stands out about the political character of Alexander Lebed, it is integrity. Lebed has been described as, "Blunt, brilliant, decisive, fair, and incorruptible."<sup>431</sup> It was also these qualities which made the Yeltsin administration uneasy during Lebed's rise in popularity. Integrity is the one ingredient that is consistently lacking in contemporary Russian politics, and is a significant reason for his appeal. Most Russians believed that members of the elite used market reforms to transform the privileges they enjoyed under communism into the even more pleasant rewards of capitalism. The majority of Russian voters are convinced that corruption is common at the highest levels of government. This widespread belief served as a focus for public resentment of the country's leaders.

Lebed, however, often described himself as free from ambiguity or dishonesty.<sup>432</sup> He portrayed himself as a plain and honest "officer and gentleman" in contrast to Russia's

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<sup>430</sup>Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "The Struggle for the Kremlin," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 13, (8 August 1996): 30.

<sup>431</sup>"Popular Russian Army General Resigns," National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, 15 June 1995, Transcript # 1629-12.

<sup>432</sup>Ariel Cohen, "General Alexander Lebed: Russia's Rising Political Star," *Heritage Foundation Reports*, 26 September 1995, p. 1.

corrupt politicians. A month before Yeltsin fired him, Lebed was still considered by opinion polls to be Russia's most trusted politician, something that being out of the Kremlin may only enhance.<sup>433</sup>

As an army general, he insisted that Russian officers must prove that "not everything has been wasted by drunkards, that honor and dignity are alive, and that this honor and dignity will protect our Motherland." After he devoted himself to politics in 1995, his reputation for strong character was already well established, both inside the military and out.

Attempts by General Pavel Grachev, the former Defense Minister and Lebed's old rival, to dig up evidence of corruption from his time as commander of the 14th Army in Moldova completely failed. Even Moldovan leaders, who had few reasons to love Lebed, admitted that he was personally honest and a strict disciplinarian.<sup>434</sup> One military inspection after another failed to find anything wrong with his 14th Army in Moldova. On the contrary, Lebed boosted morale, beefed up military drilling, created a special "Russian Soldier of the Future" program based on the Green Beret training routine, and almost eliminated the hazing and suicides which plagued the rest of the Russian military.

To many Russians, Lebed had the moral authority to be the leader of the nation. He was an honest officer in an army commanded by corrupt senior officers. He did not own a vacation home or a limousine and even gave up drinking. In a country where alcoholism is the leading cause of death and the primary reason for falling life expectancy, Lebed proudly stated, "There should be at least one man in Russia who is sober."<sup>435</sup> For this he was widely applauded.

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<sup>433</sup>"Lebed Plans For Political Comeback," CNN, *CNN Today*, 18 October 1996, Transcript # 96101806V33.

<sup>434</sup>Anatol Lieven, "Gruff General Reveals Scars That Made Him," *Times* (London), 27 June 1996.

<sup>435</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "Russian General Campaigns On Old-Time Soviet Values," *New York Times* 13 October 1995 p. A1.

Lebed campaigned that the main goal of the President is to establish law and order in the country. In his opinion, the country was in chaos, corruption was rampant and the national interests of Russia were being neglected by those who were responsible for foreign and defense policy.<sup>436</sup> As the new chairman of the national security council, he was also charged with cracking down on crime, which was by then understood as the number one social problem in Russia.

Democracy and free markets cannot survive without the rule of law. In Russia, however, precious little has been achieved in establishing a firm legal basis for a civil society based on democratic principles.<sup>437</sup> For example, private companies find little protection from the police, who sometimes are co-conspirators with the mob. In 1994, dozens of senior police officers were fired for cooperating with the Mafia, while others were killed by criminals for refusing to cooperate.<sup>438</sup>

The rise of organized crime is perhaps the most troublesome problem in Russia today. The Soviet system was corrupt in many ways, but the corruption took place according to established conventions and within a framework of order. With the collapse of the Communist Party and the rise of unregulated private enterprise, corruption, coercion and the violence that go with them are spreading exponentially. The murder rate is rocketing upwards. People fear to go on the streets. Some Russian businessmen say openly that it will soon be necessary to set up death squads to eliminate the villains. The real risk to Russia's future may not be that it will revive the authoritarian patterns of Russian past, but that it will become a seedy, violent, corrupt and poverty-stricken imitation of Latin America today.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>436</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no.3, (Autumn 1995): 417-37.

<sup>437</sup>Ariel Cohen, "Congressional Testimony," *Federal Document Clearing House Congressional Testimony*, 31 January 1996.

<sup>438</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>439</sup>Rodric Braithwaite, "Russian Realities and Western Policy," *Survival* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): pp. 11-27.

Lebed claimed he would restore law and order, defend Russia's national interests and protect ordinary citizens from the excesses of the market economy. "Russia will be led out of its troubles not by some film actor with a Hollywood smile but by a person who is honest, principled and sound of mind."<sup>440</sup> In a campaign speech, he made it clear he was concerned about corruption: "Those who profit are the ones at the top. They keep the doughnut for themselves and give the hole to the people."<sup>441</sup>

Lebed promised he would reverse "unfair" privatization by forcing those who profited "illegally" to give the money back or lose their businesses. Although, he did not say how he would distinguish honest entrepreneurs from the opportunists: "It's hard, but it can be done. When I am elected [President], we'll talk."<sup>442</sup> To the people who became property owners in accordance with law, Lebed said they have "nothing to fear. Nobody will confiscate his enterprise. I wish him the best and he can work in peace."<sup>443</sup> More than any other issue, this may create widespread domestic tension at all levels of a Lebed government.

Lebed talked as if he equated privatization with crime and corruption. Although in 1996, while still emphasizing crime and corruption, he became vocal in his support of private property. Lebed clearly gave Russia's new businessmen the message that he would be like Chilean leader Augusto Pinochet, a dictator who also supported capitalist development.<sup>444</sup> Lebed, however, did not favor Pinochet's free trade policies, but instead the state-oriented, protectionist policies of the Asian dictators of the past and present.

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<sup>440</sup>Ivan Rodin, "Party Backs Gen. Lebed for Russian Presidency," *Reuters, Limited*, 11 January 1996.

<sup>441</sup>Mayak Radio Network, Moscow, 14 May 1996.

<sup>442</sup>"Russia Has Own 'Colin Powell'; Ex-Soviet General Has an Eye on Presidency," *Chicago Tribune*, New York Times News Service, Moscow, 15 October 1995, p. 14.

<sup>443</sup> "Press Conference With General Alexander Lebed, A Leader of the Congress of Russian Communities Electoral Bloc," *Federal News Service*, 11 January 1996.

<sup>444</sup>Jerry Hough, "Lebed: Next Pinochet?," *Moscow Times*, 25 June 1996.



Lebed's use of the anti-crime slogan was a winning move. After he joined Yeltsin's team, he left no doubt he would impose a strong hand on Russia's domestic chaos. In one widely publicized statement he declared, "Of course we will have to shoot people, but reasonably, with minimal loss, just those who refuse to be persuaded."<sup>445</sup> If Lebed achieves presidential power, his fight against the corrupt former communists holding power and property has the potential to ignite serious domestic issues, possibly leading to a question of legitimacy of his government from those who are a victim of Lebed's strict policies. The question also remains whether Lebed's characteristics of honor and integrity will survive the immense temptations of government in Moscow.

## **B. MAVERICK OR RUSSIA'S NATIONAL HERO?**

During his four months in office, Lebed sparked as many political fires as he put out. As he continued his way towards his goal of becoming Russia's next president, the Russian people were increasingly drawn to both sides of his split personality, as impressed with the maverick as with the miracle worker.<sup>446</sup> He negotiated a peace settlement in Chechnya, calmed the fear over eastward NATO expansion, pacified troops on the verge of mutiny and gave disillusioned Russians a leader they could believe in.

But there was another side to Lebed. He also slandered "foreign" religions, upset diplomacy with Ukraine, suggested a coalition government with communists, and openly coveted the job of the president who appointed him.<sup>447</sup>

Lebed's image as a "Mr. Clean," who could sweep corruption from the Kremlin, police, army and security services began to fade after the appointment to Yeltsin's administration. Yet Lebed's less attractive public side should not have come as a surprise,

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<sup>445</sup>Ann Leslie, "Whatever Russia's Election Result, Lebed is the Man to Watch," *Daily Mail*, 4 July 1996, p. 24.

<sup>446</sup>Carol J. Williams, "Russians Drawn to Both Sides of Maverick Lebed," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>447</sup>Ibid.

considering his history. Analysts and journalists seemed to easily forget that Lebed earned his reputation as a tough leader in brutal fashion while he was in the military.

Before the 1996 presidential elections, it was difficult to ever picture Lebed as a member of Yeltsin's administration. At a time when the defense ministry desperately needed a political advocate and administrator, he was a fighting general going against the grain. His sense of betrayal by politicians was a recurring subject of his announcements. In September 1992, for example, he complained that: "This former great power has fallen into miserable pieces, it is being torn apart, it is being sold. Tverskaya street, one of Russia's main streets, has turned into a pitiful imitation of one of New York's backstreets."

Lebed's blend of nationalism and anti-corruption zeal led to considerable friction with the President. Asked if he would investigate corruption even if the problems led to the people close to Yeltsin, Lebed said he would move slowly and peacefully. But, he added, "I will create strong order from this Russian mess."<sup>448</sup> It was a promise that might have caused a great deal of conflict with those in the administration.

Another problem for Yeltsin was that Lebed was happiest when fighting the establishment from the opposition's side. While Yeltsin became famous for criticizing the status quo as Moscow communist party chief, Lebed became popular by attacking the corrupt military establishment far removed from politics in Moldova. He launched his political campaign when he was forced into retirement in 1995. Yeltsin was quick to recognize the parallels and his aides started negotiations with Lebed long before the first round of the presidential elections.<sup>449</sup>

Even some admirers wondered if Lebed, who was not known for his political sophistication, could run the country.<sup>450</sup> But Lebed, like other politicians in this fragile democracy, learned as he went along. Few of Russia's leaders have mastered the art of

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<sup>448</sup>Yuri N. Maltsev, "Lebed Is in Position To Shape Russia's Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1996, p. 19.

<sup>449</sup>Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

<sup>450</sup>Candice Hughes, "Blunt General Waits in Wings of Chechen Crisis," *Associated Press*, 11 January 1995.

political correctness, but it did not make them all potential dictators.<sup>451</sup> Lebed had a tendency to make spontaneous comments without thinking and to backtrack later. Talking tough was how he got to the top and it was a habit he had difficulty breaking.

Part of Lebed's appeal was that he was not a career politician. His remarks in campaign speeches and interviews were often spontaneous. Yet he also showed he is self-confident enough to revise his views in the face of evidence.<sup>452</sup>

As an example, Lebed changed his opinion on the Soviet operations in Georgia and Azerbaijan that he commanded. By March of 1995 he had concluded that these were both costly mistakes. He regretted, "Everything we tried to hold onto by force was lost."<sup>453</sup> Lebed has also denounced Soviet intervention against Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1967, and Lithuania in 1991, not to mention Russia's ongoing military assault on Chechnya, which he has criticized harshly. One reason that then-Minister of Defense Grachev relieved Lebed in June of 1995 was that he refused an order to lead Russian forces intervening in Tajikistan's civil war. He asked, "Why should a Russian general help one group of Tajiks kill another group of Tajiks?"<sup>454</sup> This is a surprising question from someone with Lebed's history of human-rights abuses in Azerbaijan and Soviet Georgia.

It seems Lebed's biggest problem was not the goals that he had for the Russian people, but the way he changed his ideas on how to accomplish the task. Sometimes he sounded merely like a firm but fair administrator, but other times he came across like a brutal commander at his worst. According to journalist Frederick Starr, Lebed quickly grew impatient with the give and take of democracy, which appealed to those who

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<sup>451</sup>Gwynne Dyer, "A Good Day in Russia: Yeltsin's Allies Will Give Country Stability at the Centre," *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 July 1996, p. B2.

<sup>452</sup> S. Frederick Starr, "A Russian Politician to Reckon With," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 December 1995, p. 19.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

thought Russia needed a "strong hand." Although at the same time, he was distressing to Russia's new democrats.<sup>455</sup>

There are still no guarantees that Lebed's views and policies will not continue to change. Parts of the Russian society, such as the military-industrial complex, the security and the armed forces, remain inherently hard-line. They will always seek the most senior political figures to represent them, and Lebed seems to be almost tailor-made for such a role.<sup>456</sup>

Political analyst Alexander Golz wrote in the army newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* that Lebed's "personal courage, obvious military talent and the independence of his judgments, combined with his integrity and his open contempt for political maneuvering, make him a rare figure in Russia today."<sup>457</sup> Clearly Russia needs such people as Alexander Lebed, but it is unlikely that Russia needs a leader that resembles General Augusto Pinochet.

## C. "I AM A BIRD OF A DIFFERENT HUE"

### 1. Lebed's New Set of Rules for Russian Politics

"I am not a liberal. I am a general." - *Ottawa Citizen*, July 4, 1996

Lebed seemingly became the Russian politician that defined the middle ground between the communists and reformers, but his constituency was totally independent from either side. He advanced this identity during his campaign by refusing to join a Yeltsin-led coalition of democratic candidates, because he did not think "the existing government is any better than communists." In an *Izvestia* newspaper interview he said, "As long as the country is run by a *nomenklatura*, a self-perpetuating elite group with Communist Party

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ariel Cohen, "Czar Lebed?" *Washington Times*, 3 July 1996, p. A17.

<sup>457</sup> Alexander Golz quoted by Candice Hughes, "Blunt General Waits in Wings of Chechen Crisis," *Associated Press*, 11 January 1995.

cards or tricolor badges, there will be no normal life. Both the Whites and the Reds have the same *nomenklatural* origins but I am a bird of a different hue."<sup>458</sup>

After he was forced to resign from the army, Lebed lost the aura of the persecuted general speaking for the disgruntled Russian military. Moreover, he was seen by some in the career military as having pushed the army toward a confrontation with the defense minister and the president that eroded the military's neutrality and its position "outside of politics." Lebed still quickly became a general who used his military command to boost his political career.<sup>459</sup> By appealing to the media and civilian paramilitary forces, such as the Cossacks, Lebed played by a new set of rules for Russian politics.

Many in the West believed that after Yeltsin was re-elected president, Russians may have voted into power an enigmatic ex-general with nationalistic views and a violent temper.<sup>460</sup> While he did have nationalistic views, Lebed never openly suggested using violence against Russia's ethnic minorities and believed that Russia should withdraw from Chechnya.<sup>461</sup> Although he made many inflammatory statements and saw no ethnic difference between Russians and Ukrainians, he did not think it practical or possible to recreate the Soviet Union. He did not approve of professional soldiers being used to control civilians, as Lebed himself used in Tbilisi and Azerbaijan, and were being used in Chechnya. Lebed likes authority, but above all he was a pragmatist who advocates force only when unavoidable. He was blunt with a strong sense of mission.

Reflecting on the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lebed had this to say on the use of force:

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<sup>458</sup>"Lebed Says He Will Not Join Yeltsin Coalition," Interfax news agency, Moscow, 12 May 96, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 13 May 1996.

<sup>459</sup>Ariel Cohen, "General Alexander Lebed: Russia's Rising Political Star," *Heritage Foundation Reports*, 26 September 1995, p. 1.

<sup>460</sup>Mike Trickey, "Yeltsin Victory Puts Lebed in Driver's Seat," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 July 1996, p. A8.

<sup>461</sup>Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

I know for sure that constitutional order cannot be restored by using air force, tanks and artillery. We used military power in Tbilisi, Baku, Vilnius. Where are they today -- Georgia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania? Everything we tried to keep by force was lost. Now everything is being done in order to lose Chechnya.<sup>462</sup>

These remarks, made while Lebed was still in the army, seemed to contradict his statements that Russian troops were necessary in foreign countries.

His questionable comments after his appointment to Yeltsin's administration about his opposition to "foreign" religions, however, reflected his ethnic origins as a Cossack. Cossacks have been traditionally feared not only for their legendary fighting prowess in defending the czar's southern borders, but also for their brutality against Jews in the state-organized pogroms in pre-Revolutionary Russia.<sup>463</sup>

Lebed discovered, at the expense of his public image, that attitudes permissible in Russian army barracks do not play so well under the scrutiny of the world's television cameras.<sup>464</sup> During his 1996 visit to the US, Lebed tried to assure Jewish groups that he was "misquoted" about there being only two religions in Russia, though his subsequent praise of Jews as "managing money well" assuaged nobody.<sup>465</sup>

Nationalists who can talk the language of the common people, which includes a market economy but does not mean cooperating with the West, are an attractive option in the rough and ready world of today's Russia. Zhirinovskiy showed this with his stunning successes in the parliamentary elections of 1993 and 1995. But Russians did not want a man who most consider to be a lunatic as their president. Scott maintained that Lebed was

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<sup>462</sup>Rodion Morozov and Vladimir Snegirev, "Lebedinyi ryk sotriasayet kremlevskie steny," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 2 March 1995, p. 1.

<sup>463</sup>Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

<sup>464</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>465</sup>William Safire, "Lebedtime Story," *New York Times*, 25 November 1996, p. A13.

a bright, believable, clean-looking military man who capitalized upon the emotions that Zhirinovskiy had stirred with his populist rants.<sup>466</sup>

Before Lebed's departure, Aleksei Golovkov, a campaign aide to Lebed and the deputy chairman of Parliament's budget committee said, "Lebed is not inclined to play the political games according to the rules established in the Kremlin. Either he will be squeezed out of these games and will be compelled to leave, or the rules of the game will be changed."<sup>467</sup> Yeltsin vividly demonstrated that he was not one to change the rules, but because of this characteristic, Lebed remained far more admired by Russian voters than any of his rivals.<sup>468</sup>

## **2. Neither Red Nor White, But Green**

Hey, little apple tree,

Color so ripe,

On the left we fight the Reds,

On the right the Whites

-Peasant song of the Russian civil wars, 1918-1922<sup>469</sup>

Lebed had spent his entire adult life in the army, and appealed to Russians for what he is not. He seemed unspoiled by politics. He was not allied with any of the Moscow political factions, which seemed to always be arguing with each other. He was not a reformer, not a Communist, not associated with the unpopular war in Chechnya and was not linked to the "party of power" in the Kremlin.

On the Russian television program *Vremya*, Lebed raised the possibility of a civil war after the 1996 presidential elections between what he called the Reds and Whites, or communists and reformers. When asked what side he would be on, he insisted, "I will be

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<sup>466</sup>Carey Scott, "Lebed Reaches for the Reins," *Sunday Times* (London), 7 July 1996.

<sup>467</sup>Michael R. Gordon, "Russian Vote Sets Off Battle, This Time in Yeltsin's Camp," *New York Times*, 6 July 1996, p. A1.

<sup>468</sup>Alessandra Stanley, "A General on His Own," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A1.

<sup>469</sup>Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 102.

with the Greens, and beat the Reds until they whiten and the Whites until they redden."<sup>470</sup> Fitting for Lebed to align himself with the "Greens." Whether or not he understood the reference, the Greens was the label attached to the peasant rebels during the Russian civil wars between 1918 and 1922. Lebed's followers of the nineties could certainly be characterized as peasant rebels. During that time, the peasants were fighting on two fronts, just as Lebed's followers were confronting two political ideologies.

Lebed was quick to identify with the military sentiment before the 1996 elections. He related with soldiers' confusion about a possible confrontation, but voiced his ultimate concern to prevent violence:

I am against shooting. I had my fill. I think all the potential has been exhausted... We must think about how we should live, and not how we should shoot. I personally intend to chop the hands of those who are anxious to shoot. And to all the others I wish a long and happy life. And I don't mind what they call themselves. Let them live, let them create, and strive, build communist or democratic villages, throw chairs at each other in parliament -- nothing wrong about that, it can even be useful sometimes. But the guns should be mothballed.<sup>471</sup>

These were not the words of a democrat, but neither were they the words of a red-brown nationalist ready to implement a martial law state.

During his rise in politics, Lebed refused to name himself as a "democrat" and said that he "would have refused" orders from Grachev to attack the "White House" in October 1993.<sup>472</sup> At the same time, however, he distanced himself from the official opposition and in the December 1993 election "voted against all candidates and trusted

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<sup>470</sup> "Press Conference With Alexander Lebed," *Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast*, 13 May 1996.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no.3, (Autumn 1995): 417-37.



none.<sup>473</sup> Remarking that he did not support Yeltsin's reforms, nor the communists insistence on stopping the reforms, Lebed once stated: "As for myself, I want to preserve peace and calm in the center... Both these flanks are tantamount to war. I am against war..."<sup>474</sup>

Lebed appealed to hard-liners with his vision of a strong army and a mighty Russia and to reformers with a liberal economic program. His slogan of "Truth and Order" and promise to purge corruption and crime appealed to many Russians. He blasted the Communist past and the "even greater vileness and lies" of today's Russia. At the end of his campaign, however, Lebed saw Russia as a battlefield of two ideas - the old idea of communism and the new idea of imperfect democracy. "I'm choosing the new idea," Lebed announced after joining forces with Yeltsin. "You cannot go very far with old ideas."<sup>475</sup>

#### **D. A SOLDIER'S DUTY TO THE PEOPLE**

"Russia has chosen the right course. But a bill has been drawn on people's expectations, and it must now be redeemed."

-Lebed shortly after Yeltsin's reelection, *The Guardian*, July 5, 1996

Alexander Lebed was a phenomenon. He was an incorruptible leader in a corrupt, disheartened bureaucracy. In a political field of scandalous ex-communists, he assured voters that he upheld the deepest sense of personal honor. The Grachev feud graphically

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<sup>473</sup>See *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 16 November 1994. Quoted from Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security* 4, no.3, (Autumn 1995): 417-37.

<sup>474</sup>"Gen Aleksandr Lebed Confident of Winning Presidential Election," Russian Television Network, Moscow, 23 February 1996 in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 26 February 1996.

<sup>475</sup>Sergei Shargorodsky, "Ex-General a Threat or Boon to Russia's Democracy?" *Associated Press*, 22 June 1996.

demonstrated his conviction that when a man loses his honor it can rarely be restored. His honor and incorruptible image were the backbone of his popular success.

Throughout his rise in politics, Lebed was convinced that the armed forces encapsulated most of what was good, honorable and worthwhile in Russian (and Soviet) life. This gave him a very wide platform on which to campaign. In part, this reflected his experiences in Moldova. Having supported the "Dniester Republic", he increasingly came to see its leaders as little more than opportunist mafiosi. In February 1994, he denounced the Dniester regime as "criminal" and "a bunch of adventurers who came to power by exploiting people's natural desire for freedom."

While Lebed was often crude, forceful, and hostile to his political authorities, he was also a fierce advocate of the military discipline which, ultimately, subordinated him to them. His transition from the hero of the coup in August 1991 to the "black general" of 1993 illustrated so many of the traits of Russian political leadership at the time and highlighted its mood of despair and alienation.

Similar to ex-Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, an unsuccessful officer-turned-politician, Lebed will always be at heart a soldier. His sense of duty and national honor persuaded him to involve himself in politics, and he was a charismatic candidate. Although he did not have the skills of a politician or economist, he knew how to answer questions and focus on one issue.

Making a conscious decision to involve himself forcefully and directly in Russian politics, it took a lot to make the soldier Lebed resign from the army. It was more likely that he would have inherited the role as the "voice of the army" after his resignation. Lebed often claimed he was pushed into politics. Moreover, he was compelled to act on his own. Sooner or later, the voters were bound to turn towards him.

Lebed was, above all, a fighting general and a self-styled independent when the Yeltsin government desperately needed the military's support. While many in the West characterized Lebed as a nationalist plotting to turn the country into a martial law state, he in fact upheld the regime he opposed, and became the soldier's ideal of honor and selfless commitment to the nation.

Lebed was respected in the army for his professionalism and plain talking, but many civilians also chose him because they believed he offered a third way between the anarchy of Yeltsin's rule and the defeat of retreat towards Communism. *Moscow Times* correspondent Alexander Zhilin contends Lebed is still considered the most credible unofficial leader of Russia's military, and he is doing everything he can to maintain this identity.<sup>476</sup> His moral support among the officers' corps - and now among a large segment of the population - will give him the strength to withstand the ups and downs of Russian politics and may well carry him to his goal of Russia's highest office.

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<sup>476</sup>Alexander Zhilin, "For the Soul of the Russian Army," *Moscow Times*, 29 June 1996.

## VII. CONCLUSION

"I was born a winner. Sooner or later I will be. The country needs order, and I will bring this." - *Daily Mail*, July 04, 1996

Lebed's popularity was a disturbing symptom of Russia's tendency to look toward its military officers for a savior. His message had strong appeal to millions of Russians battered by the dismantling of a state-controlled economy that long provided a low but reliable standard of living.<sup>477</sup> The discontent in Russia was aggravated by a general breakdown of order, rising crime and a sense that it lost its place among the first rank of world powers. During the rise of Alexander Lebed, the greatest force in Russia was not democracy--it was nationalism.

Lebed was a charismatic patriot and crusader for justice, but he was also simply a politician trying to achieve power. In doing so, his political campaign skillfully used nationalism and the appeal of strong military leadership at a time when everything he grew up to believe in gradually came apart during the five years after the Soviet Union's collapse. In Russia's situation, the people were demanding a leader like Lebed, and if he did not exist, another surely would have been created.

He possessed an imputed charisma that he was able to project upon the Russian people. By creating an ambiguity, Lebed could lead people with their response to his assertions and allegations. Rather than the people responding to Lebed, Lebed was the mythical man on horseback responding to the wishes of the people. He was a product of the situation.

If Lebed is someday elected president, there is no doubt that he would move the regime towards a new type of authoritarianism. As he has asserted, "Democracy is fine, but Russians will need decades to grow into it."<sup>478</sup> So today, Russia's future remains open. Andranik Migranyan, a member of Yeltsin's advisory council, could not say for sure where

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<sup>477</sup>"The Race for Russian President," *New York Times*, 18 February 1996, p. A12.

<sup>478</sup>Adrian Karatnycky, "The Russian Front-Runner," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 September 1995, p. 14.

Russia will go after the elections of 1996 -- toward a consolidation of democracy or a consolidation of authoritarianism.<sup>479</sup> It will be a distinctively Russian future. Russia will not become like America, Germany or Japan. One thing that looks certain is that Alexander Lebed will remain in the political spotlight for years to come.

The West is still undecided as to how to treat the coming of Alexander Lebed. Initially the West reacted calmly to Lebed's sudden rise to political prominence.<sup>480</sup> A spokesman for the US State Department welcomed Lebed's appointment to Yeltsin's administration by saying Lebed and Yeltsin seemed to complement each other in a tandem of like-minded politicians.<sup>481</sup>

New assessments of Lebed's role, however, revealed serious doubts after the western community recalled that previously Lebed had behaved as a confirmed Russian nationalist. The most accommodating assessment came from the London School of Economics: it was argued that given Russia must find its own path leading to democracy through authoritarianism, Lebed was the best choice for that role.<sup>482</sup>

After Lebed was fired four months later, senior American officials saw little effect on Russian-American relations because Lebed had not yet become an important player.<sup>483</sup> They were, however, worried that the popular but controversial peace settlement Lebed

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<sup>479</sup>Lee Hockstader "Russian Democracy Gets Another Chance; But Potential for New Kremlin Conflicts Remains After Ailing Yeltsin's Victory," *Washington Post*, 4 July 1996, p. A01.

<sup>480</sup>M. Podkopayeva, "Russia And Pinochet," *Zavtra*, p. 2, in *Russian Press Digest*, 3 July 1996.

<sup>481</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>482</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>483</sup>Defense Secretary William J. Perry, in Moscow to urge the Russian Parliament to ratify the second strategic arms reduction treaty, or Start II, told reporters that the personal and security ties among high Russian and American officials are "strong and growing." He said he "did not see any fundamental change in the U.S.-Russian relationship in terms of this announcement." See Steven Erlanger, "For White House, Lebed's Dismissal Is a Case of Dogs Fighting Under a Carpet," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A16.

negotiated with secessionists in Chechnya could unravel.<sup>484</sup> US Ambassador Thomas Pickering noted that Lebed's departure may open a political vacuum. Lebed is "a considerable force in Russian politics ... (but) Yeltsin has made clear, when it comes to the crunch, he will act."<sup>485</sup>

There is no way to know if the US should fear the worst from Lebed's rise in politics, but even Lebed admitted that Russia has little choice but to engage the West. The US should likewise reach out to the possible future leader of Russia. In a positive gesture at maintaining communication, high level discussions began in November 1996 between Lebed and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott.

During the visit, Lebed demonstrated he was not the inept politician portrayed in Western journalism. He was well briefed to give answers Americans want to hear. In a favorable statement for Americans, he said he is "not going to have a hysterical fit because of NATO's expansion."<sup>486</sup> Yet, as if Russia were threatened by the West, he also spoke vaguely about a "new security system," which is appealing to his Russian constituency.

The best way for the US to respond to Lebed or other nationalist leaders is simply not to appease them. This means the firm and consistent advocacy of NATO expansion, a refusal to foster Russian illusions by treating Russia as a superpower, and devising programs that bolster Ukraine's economic and political independence.<sup>487</sup> The US should also keep giving assistance to Russia's considerable democratic forces. This policy should be central to a US-led response to Russia's return to a hard-line government.

Russia's political elite still have deep psychological scars from the collapse of their once mighty Soviet empire. The leaders of Russia will be dealing with this enigma for

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<sup>484</sup>Steven Erlanger, "For White House, Lebed's Dismissal Is a Case of Dogs Fighting Under a Carpet," *New York Times*, 18 October 1996, p. A16.

<sup>485</sup>Susanne M. Schafer, "Perry: 'No Fundamental Change' In U.S.-Russian Relationship With Russia," *AP Worldstream*, 17 October 1996.

<sup>486</sup>William Safire, "Lebedtime Story," *New York Times*, 25 November 1996, p. A13.

<sup>487</sup>Adrian Karatnycky, "The Russian Front-Runner," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 September 1995, p. 14.

many years to come, and until a younger generation takes power, they will continue to create tension with the US and Europe. Because the idea of democracy will take many years to take hold, the end of the Yeltsin era will bring new opportunities and dangers, for Russia and for the world.

## APPENDIX A. SELECTED COMMENTS OF ALEXANDER LEBED

- ON WHY HE SHOULD BE PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA: "I stop wars." 25 November 1996, *New York Times*
- ON MIKHAIL GORBACHEV: "Mikhail is constantly trying to turn himself into my daddy - and I am constantly trying to stay an orphan." NTV, Moscow, 6 May 1996.
- ON GENERAL COLIN POWELL: "We are both patriots and professionals. We understand what war really means." *New York Times*, 13 October 1995
- ON THE BREAK-UP OF THE SOVIET UNION: "Anyone who doesn't regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart. Anyone who thinks it can be put back together has no brain." *Baltimore Sun*(From wire reports) 29 December 1995.
- ON HIS ADMIRATION OF CHILE'S FORMER MILITARY DICTATOR, GEN. AGUSTO PINOCHET: "In general, I'm not one to praise Pinochet. But what did he do? He saved the state from total collapse and put the army in a place of pride. With its help, he forced people to get back to work. The loudmouths were forced, and were forced in a brutal manner, to get back to work." *Reuters*, 20 July 1994
- ON GOVERNING RUSSIA: "What's wrong with a military dictator? In all its history, Russia has prospered under the strictest control. Consider Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great or Stalin." *Financial Times*, 6 September 1994
- ON RUSSIAN LIFE: "We have a wonderful territory one-eighth of the world, its mineral wealth is unbelievable but we live like pigs, year in and year out, decade after decade. Why? Eventually the question is about how the life of society is organized, right? That is exactly what we want to change: the organization of the life of society." *Russia's Independent Television*, 30 June 1995
- MORE ON RUSSIAN LIFE: "Most Russians don't care whether they are ruled by fascists or communists or even Martians as long as they can buy six kinds of sausage in the store and lots of cheap vodka." - *Financial Times* (London), 6 September 1994
- ON RELIGION: "I do not go to church. I am a nonbeliever. Everyone is born on his own and dies on his own. Everyone comes to God on his own, too. I have not come to God, but maybe I will." *Moskovskiye Novosti*, 10 September 1995



- ON FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER PAVEL GRACHEV: "He has lost his honor and dignity. I consider him a prostitute, and I don't like prostitutes, whether in skirts or pants." *Corriere Della Sera*, 15 October 1995
- ON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE GRIGORIY YAVLINSKIY: "I am a friend of all professionals, and Grigoriy Yavlinskiy is a professional. The fact that we have been given places in different political cages does not mean we have to sit in them." *Ekho Moskv*y radio, 31 January 1996
- ON WHAT IT TAKES TO COMMAND TROOPS: "A good officer is first of all a good actor. The people who come into the army are all different, and you fail if you try to treat them the same way." *Trud*, 28 October 1995
- ON RELATIONS WITH UKRAINE: "The Black Sea Fleet question is being decided by rust. Neither Russia nor Ukraine can resolve the issue. It's a great idiocy and a crime against our shared future. There's not a single archaeologist or historian or anyone else who can explain exactly what is the difference between Ukrainians and Russians." *Ostankino Radio Mayak*, Moscow, 15 December 1995
- ON COMMUNISTS AND THE NEW RUSSIAN DEMOCRATS: "We are not a nation, but a demographic hole, and still we have Reds and Whites, only now they are called communists and reformers, or communists and democrats. But basically they are still Reds and Whites. This is their essence." *Official Kremlin International News*, 13 May 1996

## APPENDIX B. CHRONOLOGY OF LEBED'S LIFE AND CAREER

- 1950 Born on 20 April in the industrial city of Novocherkassk in the Rostov region of southern Russia.
- 1962 Witnesses the "Novocherkassk massacre" on 2 June, when Soviet troops guarding the local Communist headquarters opened fire on workers staging a rare protest against rising prices and falling wages. The shooting killed 24 people, and several others were subsequently executed.
- 1973 Graduates from Ryazan Higher Airborne Assault Command School, and takes command of paratrooper unit at age 23.
- 1980-82 Commands the first battalion of the 345th Separate Paratroops Regiment in Afghanistan. Awarded the highest Soviet military decoration, Hero of the Soviet Union, for bravery in combat.
- 1985 Graduates with distinction from the Frunze Military Academy.
- 1985-89 Rises from paratrooper regiment commander to division commander of the elite 106th Guards Airborne Division in Tula, approximately one-hundred miles south of Moscow.
- April 1989 Sent to put down demonstrations in Tbilisi, Soviet Georgia. Over twenty people were killed and dozens wounded when a *spetsnaz* unit under his command used sapper shovels and chemical weapons to suppress ethnic unrest. Lebed maintains he flew in with reinforcements after the attacks had happened.
- January 1990 Named by an Azerbaijani parliamentary commission as the individual who ordered soldiers to open fire on demonstrators in Baku, Azerbaijan. Using

armored personnel carriers, his troops shot, stabbed to death and crushed more than 120 Azerbaijanis.

- 1990 Quits Communist Party after attending two party conferences, saying he became tired of "screaming, rackets and petty bickering."
- 1991 Protects Russian President Boris Yeltsin's Moscow stronghold during hard-liners' coup attempt against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. His tanks inadvertently became part of the barricades protecting the building. Says it was not a stand for democracy, but that he could not kill Russians.
- 1992-94 Commands Russian 14th Army in Moldova's breakaway region of Trans-Dniester, scene of ethnic conflict between the Moldovan government and mainly Slav separatists. Lebed's forces launch artillery barrages against the Moldovans, yet separatists took credit. Because Lebed kept silent about the attack, he was widely praised for ending the bloodshed peacefully.
- 1995 Quits military over conflict with Defense Minister Pavel Grachev. Grachev had called for bringing Lebed's 14th Army and its arsenal back to Russia proper and demanded both the removal of Lebed and a dramatic reduction in the 14th Army's manpower.
- December 1995 Elected to the State Duma, lower house of parliament.
- June 1996 Finishes strong third in presidential elections; joins Yeltsin's team as head of Security Council. Lebed persuades Yeltsin to dismiss Defense Minister Grachev and the leading members of Yeltsin's inner circle assembled around him since August of 1991.

- August 1996 Signs agreements with Chechen separatist leaders ending 20 months of fighting in the breakaway republic. Accord is publicly praised but meets with resistance from some top Russian politicians who say it will cause Russia to lose Chechnya.
- October 1996 Dismissed as head of Security Council. Yeltsin accuses Lebed of excessive ambition and complains that Lebed made decisions without consulting the president and the rest of the government.



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